UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE COMMON AND CONTESTED GROUND:
A HISTORY OF THE NORTHWESTERN PLAINS FROM A.D. 200 TO 1806

BY

THEODORE BINNEMA ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CLASSICS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Common and Contested Ground: A History of the Northwestern Plains from A.D. 200 to 1806" submitted by Theodore Binnema in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.

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Abstract

For many centuries, the northwestern plains were the common and contested ground of various human societies. Aspects of the climate, topography, and vegetation of the northwestern plains rendered the region a bison oasis that attracted human communities from neighbouring less abundant environments. Communities established in the region had to forge and maintain cooperative links with others yet also had to prove their willingness and ability to protect their position. Changing patterns of trade, warfare, and diplomacy reflect the efforts of diverse nomadic communities to find security among the abundant resources of the northwestern plains. This study relies upon a broad range of sources to examine the history of the northwestern plains beginning with the arrival of bow and arrow technology around the year A.D. 200. It explores how the arrival of horses, European weapons, Old World diseases, and Euroamerican traders affected patterns of human interaction. It argues that the horse and gun revolution, between 1730 and 1770, either established or entrenched a particular pattern of interethnic coalitions and hostilities. This pattern persisted until 1806 when various events led to dramatic changes in alignments and power balances.

At a broader level, this study encourages historians to move beyond the themes of cultural change and continuity and Native-newcomer relations when they attempt to reconstruct the history of North America and of aboriginal societies in particular. It suggests that a multidisciplinary "contextualist" approach should replace the "culturalist" orientation of much of the twentieth-century scholarship. Native bands were not "primitive" or "simple" but were complex, dynamic interethnic entities that, although politically autonomous, were inevitably affiliated with neighbours. Both the local band

and the interethnic coalition were usually more important in the history of the northwestern plains than was the cultural group. Euroamerican newcomers were not merely the representatives of an alien culture. They quickly became important participants in a dynamic mosaic.

Acknowledgments

I have accumulated many and considerable scholarly and personal debts while I researched and wrote this study. I have acknowledged many of the intellectual debts in my citations. Over the course of the last several years I came to admire the work of many scholars in several disciplines. Each citation represents a "thank you." The citations, however, do not adequately reflect all my debts. I suspect that my experience with my supervisory committee was exceptional, for the members of my committee were unfailingly supportive and helpful. For the time they devoted, I thank each of them. I especially recognize the aid of Dr. John E. Foster, under whose supervision this project began. Professor Foster and I spent many hours in his office discussing and debating issues and questions surrounding my research. I remember those times with fondness. Professor Foster unstintingly emphasized the responsibility of historians to be honest to the sources and to interpret the evidence as far as it will go. Even in his illness he insisted that I show him my work. He was able to read drafts of three chapters before he died in September 1996. I think every chapter of this work bears his imprint. I also wish to thank Professors Arthur J. Ray (and the history department of the University of British Columbia) and Rod Macleod for assuming the supervision of this project after Dr. Foster's death. Professor Ray was primarily responsible for assessing and critiquing my work. Ironically, because of the tragedy of Dr. Foster's death, I have had the good fortune of being able to work very closely with two of the most gifted scholars of the fur trade in North America.

Several people, both within my supervisory committee and outside of it, have been exceptionally gracious. Several archaeologists at the Provincial Museum of Alberta have been very helpful. Dr. Jack Ives was on my supervisory committee, but he went well beyond any duty as committee member. I also benefitted from discussions with Rod Vickers, Jack Brink, and Alwynne Beaudoin at the Provincial Museum. In the end, my interpretations of aspects of the Native history of the pedestrian era differs markedly from those of some of these archaeologists. Fortunately, our disagreements have been very intellectually stimulating. I have benefitted immeasurably from the exchanges we had.

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Two other groups of people deserve thanks: the archivists at the HBCA and the staff at the University of Alberta's Interlibrary Loans office. The documents of the HBCA are a much underrated international treasure. The staff at those archives bend over backwards to make the treasure accessible. The staff at the ILLO responded with good humour to my incessant requests for microfilm from the HBCA.

Ultimately, my own family has invested and sacrificed the most so that this project could go ahead. I will not soon forget the ease with which Helen agreed that we would give up our jobs in Lethbridge and move to Edmonton so I could pursue graduate studies. It was only supposed to be a quick MA. Eight years later, three children have joined us our odyssey. When our two year old Kathryn, pencil crayon and paper in hand, excitedly announced, "I'm writing a dissertation, daddy," I understood the extent to which my children were living through this adventure with Helen and me. Derek, Kathryn, and Josiah have made it more than worthwhile. They have all also helped remind me that there is more to life than this obsession. To Helen and the children, thanks for getting me out when I needed to get out, and thank you for being so tolerant and supportive as I worked. I hope the result was worth the adventure.

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Introduction
Beyond Culturalism: Communities in Contact

> For most Whites throughout the past five centuries, the Indian of imagination and ideology has been as real, perhaps more real, than the Native American of actual existence and contact. ... Although modern artists and writers assume their own imagery to be more in line with "reality" than that of their predecessors, they employ the imagery for much the same reasons and often with the same results as those persons of the past they so often scorn as uninformed, fanciful, or hypocritical.
>
> Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., 1978.[1]

The history of the northwestern plains (see Figure 0.1) to 1806 is not the story of cultural contact, cultural clash, or cultural change. To be sure, the region has been home to diverse ethnic groups for many centuries.[2] Moreover, the arrival of Euroamericans injected a new dynamic into the region's history. Still, we cannot make sense of the patterns of human interaction in the region if we assume that they were dominated by a cultural conflict between Native and newcomer. These patterns were far too complex for that. To ignore the complexity and fluidity of inter-community relations is to trivialize the fascinating history of the region. Many different communities sought to acquire and maintain access to the abundant resources of the northwestern plains, but circumstances constantly compelled them not only to defend their position militarily, but also to forge and maintain cooperative relations with others. In other words, the northwestern plains were the common and contested ground of distinct human communities. .

Anyone researching the history of the northwestern plains to 1806 will expect a

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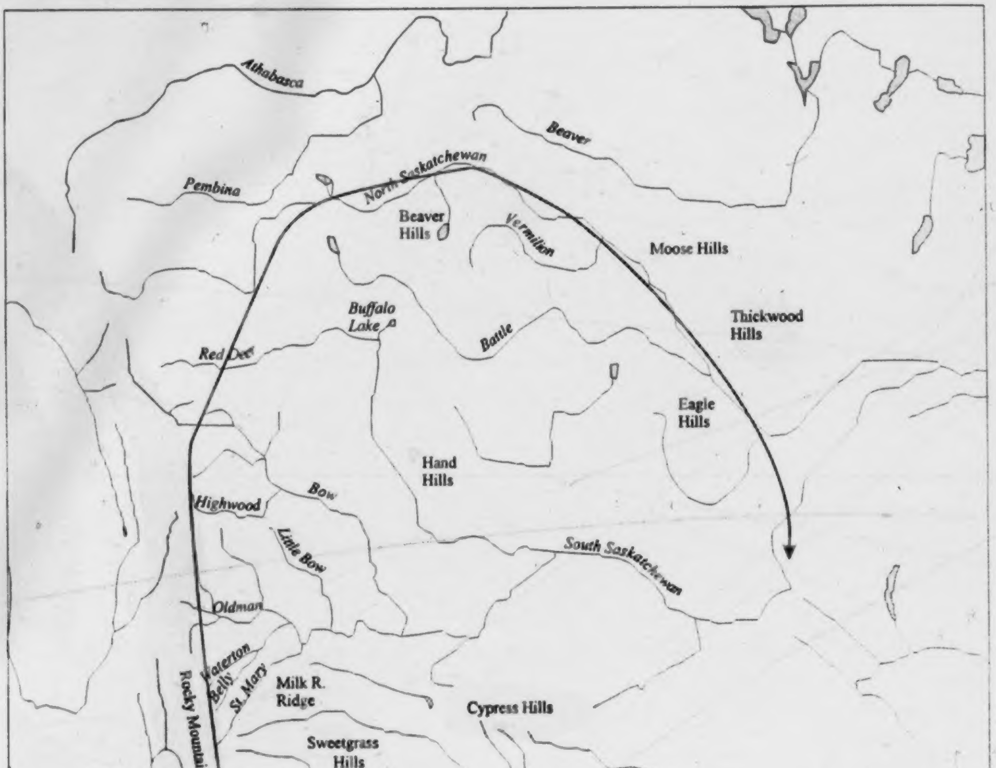
[1] Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 71.

[2] The northwestern plains, as defined in this study, form a vast region of grasslands lying east of the Rocky Mountains between the North Saskatchewan River and the Yellowstone basin.

Figure 0.1
The Northwestern Plains


Athabasca
Beaver
Pembina
North Saskatchewan
Beaver Hills
Vermilion
Moose Hills
Buffalo Lake
Thickwood Hills
Red Deer
Battle
Eagle Hills
Hand Hills
Highwood
Bow
Little Bow
South Saskatchewan
Oldman
Waterton
Belly
St. Mary
Milk R. Ridge
Cypress Hills
Rocky Mountains
Sweetgrass Hills
Flathead Lake
Marias
Milk
Bear Paw Mtns.
Little Rocky Mtns.
Highwood Mtns.
Missouri
Judith Mtns.
Big Belt Mtns.
Little Belt Mtns.
Big Snowy Mtns.
Musselshell
Crazy Mtns.
Yellowstone
Pryor Mtns.
Bighorn Mtns.

dearth of primary evidence. Given that 1806 is the starting point for many histories of the upper Missouri River basin, many might assume that there is no documentary evidence for that region before that time. They would be mistaken. The documentary evidence is substantial. This evidence, however, suggests themes very different from those that ethnohistorians and "new Native historians" usually emphasize.

The themes of culture contact, culture clash, and cultural change have dominated Native historiography in North America in the twentieth century. Particularly in the second half of the century, scholars have come to sophisticated understandings of the interactions between Old World and New World cultures. The more nuanced studies have not reduced the contact to a mere clash of cultures. The process of interaction was complex, marked not only by conflict, but also by cooperation and accommodation. Indeed, entirely new cultures have emerged as a result of the interactions. Nevertheless, ever since the early part of this century the scholarly literature on the history of the Native North Americans has become increasingly centred on questions of cultural change and continuity among Native peoples. The "culture concept" has become so important to the scholarship that in 1982, historian, Francis Jennings, argued that "there is no reasonable alternative" to it.[3]

A student might conclude that the history of the Native people of North America since 1500 is the story of the meeting of cultures. The primary evidence relating to the northwestern plains before 1806 undermines this belief. Aside from their cultural implications, the fluid and complex relationships, both peaceful and hostile, both before contact with Euroamericans and after, had other important facets. For example, we understand only superficially the environmental, political, diplomatic, military, and social dimensions of the history of the northwestern plains. In order to understand this history it is essential to move beyond culturalism towards a more contextualist historiography. A contextualist approach focuses on "an immersion in the detailed circumstances of a distant era and an effort to understand that world not as it anticipated the future but as it was experienced by those who lived in it."[4] A contextualist history of the northwestern plains to 1806 demands that we pay close attention to issues that preoccupied the historical actors, not only those that have intrigued twentieth century scholars. It is also crucial that we examine, in some detail, the emergence and growth of the "culture concept" in Native historiography.[5]

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[3] Francis Jennings, "A Growing Partnership: Historians, Anthropologists and American Indian History," *Ethnohistory* 29 (1982): 21-34. The quoted passage is on page 29.

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[4] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* Enlarged edition (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), v. While it is important for historians to attempt to understand the past as the historical actors understood it, the aim of a contextualist history is both more and less than this. Because every historical actor had a set of experiences, knowledge, and perceptions that historians cannot replicate, historians cannot understand the past precisely as the historical actors did. On the other hand, because historians have access to information not available to the historical actors, they are able to understand aspects of the past as the historical actors could not.

[5] A contextualist history is an elusive goal that can never be realized. All historians, in their attempts to reconstruct the past, also invent it, because they are unavoidably influenced by the context in which they live and by the limitations of the evidence. Historians, therefore, ought to reflect upon the work of their predecessors, reexamine the past, and offer their interpretations in humility. For a discussion of the "noble dream" of objectivity in history see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

The Emergence and Growth of the Culture Concept

The emergence and growth of the "culture concept" help account for the tremendous contributions and limitations of the existing literature. Twentieth century literature on North American Native history exhibits two general and related trends. First, the scholarship, formerly arising from very different preoccupations of historians and ethnologists, has become increasingly dominated by the interdisciplinary approaches of ethnohistorians and new Native historians. Second, the literature has become gradually more "culturalist" as scholars have grown increasingly likely to define their studies ethnically, to organize their research questions around issues of cultural contact, change, and continuity, and to emphasize culture as a determinant of human behaviour. The result is a rich but unbalanced understanding of Native history.

For many years anthropologists and historians believed that aboriginal societies experienced little change before their contact with Euroamericans. Accordingly, they carved out very separate scholarly niches. To the anthropologist, who attempted to discover the laws that govern the structure of human societies, fell the task of documenting the life ways of "primitive" peoples who were thought to represent earlier stages of cultural evolution. Historians did not study these people because they were "people without history."[6] Historians studied "hot societies" assumed to be undergoing constant change and innovation. Because of their assumptions, historians studied Native societies superficially while anthropologists studied them ahistorically.

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[6] This phrase has been used to describe indigenous societies, most prominently in Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

Before 1960, historians in the United States and Canada were relatively isolated from one another intellectually, but historians in both countries focussed on the Euroamerican dimensions of northwestern plains history. Their studies contributed significantly in their day, and some of them remain the standard histories of Euroamerican expansion on the northwestern plains during the bison era.[7] They include important histories of the fur trade.[8] Nevertheless, they explored the Native aspects of the history of the northwestern plains only superficially. More important, these historians were anticulturalist; they assumed that they could comprehend Native societies in terms similar to the way they understood Euroamerican societies. They apparently discounted any notion that different life ways and world-views may have led Natives to behave in ways very unlike Euroamericans.[9]

Early in the twentieth century historians of the northwestern plains were on the fringes of their discipline, but anthropologists who studied the Native societies of the region were on the leading edge of theirs from the late preprofessional era in the 1880s until the 1950s. The preoccupations of salvage anthropologists explain why many of the preeminent anthropologists of the first half of this century, went as students to study the Natives of the northwestern plains.

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[7] The best example of historical work on the northwestern plains during the bison era is Arthur S. Morton's, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1939] 1973). Morton's monumental study is significant because it was the first to make extensive use of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. The U.S. plains does not have a similar history, but portions of Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Plains* (Boston: Ginn, 1931) may be the most comparable.

[8] Hiram M. Chittenden *The History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West* (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1902); Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956 [1930]); E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960), E. E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967); and Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961).

[9] In a pithy summation, Bruce Trigger has aptly described Harold Innis's portrayal of Natives as "economic stereotypes only minimally disguised in feathers," Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 183-4.

Salvage ethnology could be described as, "the collection of information before the rush of civilization sweeps old methods into the limbo of the past."[10] Most anthropologists before the 1940s assumed that the "rush of civilization" had already accomplished this in much of North America. The Natives of the northwestern plains and much of the rest of northwestern North America, however, had settled on reserves and reservations only shortly before Franz Boas (1858-1942) began training the first professional American anthropologists after 1892.[11] Not surprisingly, most of the anthropologists who dominated the discipline in North America for the first half of the twentieth century — Clark Wissler, Alfred Kroeber, and Robert Lowie — cut their scholarly teeth on the reserves and reservations of the northwestern plains.[12]

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[10] This is the way Canadian salvage ethnologist T.F. McIlwraith described the task of the anthropologist in his "The Progress of Anthropology in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 11 (1930): 132-150.

[11] For a discussion of Boas's role in salvage ethnology see Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and United States Indian Policy* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 231-6. For a discussion of salvage ethnography also see Bruce G. Trigger "Archaeology and the Ethnographic Present," *Anthropolgica* 23 (1981): 3-18.

[12] Consult the bibliography of the present work for relevant titles by these scholars. Other noteworthy works of professional anthropologists include Alexander F. Chamberlain, "Report on the Kootenay Indians of Southeastern British Columbia,"

Conservationists like George Bird Grinnell, and Walter McClintock, guided by the same impulses as the salvage ethnologists, also published ethnographies of the Native societies of the northwestern plains. Because of its underlying assumptions, the ethnographic literature written in the first years of this century contains rich information about the knowledge and perceptions of the Natives during the lifetimes of the informants, but it lacks an historical sense.

The most significant legacy of the anthropologists of the early twentieth century lies in their successful efforts to establish cultural interpretations of human behaviour and to stigmatize racial interpretations. This achievement was important because racist interpretations of human behaviour dominated anthropological scholarship up to that time. Franz Boas was prominent in the antiracist struggle. Both as scholar and as social activist, he espoused cultural relativism, seeking to understand each society on its own terms and rejecting the notion that one society or individual ought to be judged by the norms of another.[13] Broader currents in American scholarship and society bolstered the

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Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science 62 (1892): 549-617; and David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1979). It should be noted, however, that salvage ethnologists of the preprofessional era of anthropology had already published the first ethnological reports of Native groups on the northwestern plains; Horatio Hale, "Report on the Blackfoot Tribes," *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* 55 (1886): 696-708; E. F. Wilson, "Report on the Blackfoot Tribes," *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* 57 (1887): 183-200; E. F. Wilson "Report on the Sarcee Indians," *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* 58 (1888): 242-55.

[13] Although Vernon Williams' *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and his Contemporaries* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), argues that Boas was never free of racist assumptions himself, it discusses the "monumental role" that Boas played in "eviscerating the racist world view that prevailed in the American social sciences during

anthropologists' efforts to combat racism. Events of the Second World War and afterwards further undermined racist interpretations of human behaviour.

Before World War II, and increasingly thereafter, the basic tenets of salvage ethnology crumbled, but scholars retained the new emphasis on cultural interpretations. Boasian scholarship persisted into the 1930s,[14] but by then researchers increasingly emphasized the dynamism of Native societies. Although many ethnohistorians date the beginnings of the field of ethnohistory to the 1940s and 1950s, the roots of ethnohistory are deeper. Clark Wissler was probably the first to use the word *ethnohistory* in 1909, apparently, to advocate the extraction of ethnological evidence from documentary sources.[15] Wissler though, was a salvage ethnologist, not an ethnohistorian. The practice of ethnohistory began with Alfred G. Bailey's Ph.D. dissertation, completed at the University of Toronto in 1934, supervised by economic historian H.A. Innis, and by

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the years before 1930," particularly the racist attitudes toward Afro-Americans. The quote is from page 4. Also see Regna Darnell, "Franz Boas and the Development of Physical Anthropology in North America," *Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3 (1982): 101-12. For literature pertaining to the role of Boas and his students in popularizing the culture idea, and combating racism see George W. Stocking, "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective," *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966): 867-82; Stanley A. Freed and Ruth S. Freed, "Clark Wissler and the Development of Anthropology in the United States," *American Anthropologist* 85 (1983): 800-25; Margaret M. Caffrey, "Ruth Benedict," in Christopher Winters, ed., *International Dictionary of Anthropologists* (New York: Garland, 1991), 44.

[14] See Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*. In 1938, Marian W. Smith, one of Boas's last graduate students, published "The War Complex of the Plains Indians," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 78 (1938): 425-64. This article uses ethnological and historical documents to describe a timeless "war complex" in the Great Plains.

[15] Shepard Krech III, "The State of Ethnohistory," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20(1991): 347.

anthropologist Thomas R. McIlwraith.[16] For various reasons, the published version of the dissertation was doomed to dwell in obscurity until it was reissued in 1969. The *American Anthropologist* did not review it at all. This is not surprising, since few anthropologists or historians were yet attuned to the kinds of insights offered. Bailey's study, which was of more theoretical interest to anthropologists than historians, was completed in a history department. Moreover, since few anthropologists studied the Natives of the east coast at the time, they would not have found it of immediate interest.

Far more influential than Bailey's work was Oscar Lewis's *The Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture, with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade*. Lewis (1914-1970) cited only published historical documents and published anthropological literature in his reevaluation of the culture history of the Blackfoot. Foreshadowing the formal emergence of ethnohistory, Lewis argued that "the intensive search for such materials [historical documents] and their exhaustive and critical analysis can help bridge the gap between the disciplines of history and anthropology."[17] Criticizing Wissler's salvage ethnographies of the Blackfoot as ahistorical and unhistorical he concluded that "the fur trade was the mainspring of Blackfoot cultural change. ... [I]t was the fur trade together with the horse and the gun which had a dynamic effect upon Blackfoot institutions."[18] A primary assumption of salvage anthropology took a direct hit in the very year of Boas's death, and anthropologists recognized it immediately. Reviewing the book for *The American Anthropologist*, E. Adamson Hoebel noted that "Lewis' major contention is that anthropology *is* history. ... When viewed with a time perspective, and not treated as though static on a fixed time plane, Plains cultures take on aspects not recognized in a good deal of the earlier literature."[19]

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[16] Bruce G. Trigger, "Alfred G. Bailey—Ethnohistorian," *Acadiensis* 18 (1989): 3-21. Bailey's dissertation was published as *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures 1504-1700: A Study in Canadian Civilization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1937] 1969). Although it is the first anthropological dissertation written at a Canadian university, Bailey's degree was in history.

[17] Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture, with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1942), 3. This study was derived from a dissertation completed at Columbia University and supervised by Ruth Benedict. Benedict, a student of Boas, played an important part during the late 1930s and early 1940s in popularizing the anthropological definition of culture and stigmatizing racism.

In 1953, Frank Raymond Secoy, a student of William Duncan Strong at Columbia University, published *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains,* another work remarkable for an anthropologist at that time.[20] Because Secoy focussed on the military aspects of Native interaction rather than upon the cultural dimensions of human relations, he naturally emphasized dynamism in Native history. It was Lewis's work, not Secoy's, however, that foreshadowed the ethnohistorical research that followed.

Ethnohistory emerged as an identifiable field of study in the 1950s.[21] The journal

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[18] Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact*, 5, 61. Quote from 61.

[19] E. Adamson Hoebel, Review of Oscar Lewis, *Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture* in *American Anthropologist* 45 (1943): 464.

[20] Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin, 1953). Strong was the primary proponent of the direct historical approach to archaeology.

[21] Harold Hickerson, *The Chippewa and Their Neighbours: A Study in Ethnohistory* Rev. ed., (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1988), xi; Jennings, "A Growing Partnership," 21.

Ethnohistory, which began publishing in 1954, invigorated the field, and that journal has since emerged as the primary international journal in the field. Just as salvage ethnologists were products of their times, ethnohistorians reflected currents within anthropology and within broader North American society in the postwar era. Boasian anthropologists had generally supported the assimilationist Indian policies in Canada and the United States. With the appointment of John Collier as United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933 a new generation of anthropologists worked with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in its efforts to support and restore Native cultures. Following Hitler's genocidal campaign of the 1930s and 1940s, North Americans found the prospect of cultural groups disappearing as a result of the actions or policies of governments increasingly disagreeable. More and more they considered the willingness of governments to support and maintain minority cultures within their boundaries to be a litmus test of social justice. Accordingly, postwar Western society and its scholars have emphasized culture, cultural pluralism, cultural relativism, and cultural survival to a far greater degree than previous generations.[22] Earlier efforts by Euroamerican governments to assimilate, "civilize," and "terminate" Native societies were now regarded as misguided at best, genocidal at worst. Western government policies came to encourage cultural heterogeneity. It is hardly surprising that students of Native history have retained the culturalist orientation of the Boasian anthropologists.

Ethnohistorians aim at integrating historical and anthropological sources, methods, and approaches to explore the history of cultural groups. The foremost ethnohistorian of the northwestern plains has been John C. Ewers of the Smithsonian Institution. While Lewis and Secoy's studies used documentary sources exclusively, Ewers's most important work was based on a combination of extensive field work and thorough documentary research. Ewers (1909-1997) completed a Masters' degree at Yale University under Clark Wissler in the early 1930s before becoming the curator of the Museum of the Plains Indian on the Blackfeet Reservation near Browning, Montana, in 1941. Based on field work conducted in 1941-44, 1947, and 1951 with Peigan and Blood informants born in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, and on extensive research in primary sources, including unpublished documents in the United States, Ewers published studies that, in the 1950s and 1960s, were the very model of ethnohistorical writing.[23]

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[22] The Canadian government officially announced a policy of multiculturalism in 1971.

As ethnohistory flourished after 1955, the scholarship of the northwestern plains languished. While the salvage ethnologists' priorities directed researchers towards the northwestern plains, the ethnohistorians' emphases on documents now led them elsewhere. Scholars, both historical and ethnohistorical, naturally focussed on research topics and cultural groups for which the documentation was perceived to be the strongest. Much of the early ethnohistorical research also arose from Native claims in the Great Lakes region. Since researchers believed that the documentary evidence for the northwestern plains was comparatively weak, and since the anthropological literature on the northwestern plains was well developed, scholars turned away from northwestern plains history.[24] Even today, the studies by Oscar Lewis, Frank Secoy, and John Ewers remain the standard works in their fields.[25] Because of the lack of recent studies on northwestern plains history, any researcher must turn to the Native history of other regions to understand how dramatically the scholarly approaches to Native history have changed since 1970.

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[23] Ewers's magnum opus was *The Blackfeet, Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958). Other important studies included John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfeet Indian Culture: With Comparative Material from Other Western Tribes* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1955); John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968); and John C. Ewer's *Blackfeet Indians: Ethnological Report on the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre Tribes of Indians* (New York: Garland, 1974). R. David Edmunds quoted a historian, unable to define ethnohistory precisely, as saying "whatever it is, John Ewers does it"; in "Native Americans, New Voices: American Indian History, 1895-1995," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 725. For a survey of Ewers's work see William N. Fenton, "John Canfield Ewers and the Great Tradition of Artists and Ethnologists of the West," in Douglas H. Ubelaker and Herman J. Viola, eds., *Plains Indian Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honor of John C. Ewers and Waldo R. Wedel* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982).

Just as anthropologists had turned to historical sources when they realized that cultural change among Native societies had deep historical roots, so historians turned increasingly to anthropological knowledge in the 1970s when they belatedly discovered that Native behaviour during the fur trade did not seem to conform to patterns of Euroamerican behaviour.[26] The new emphasis on social history in the 1970s and 1980s further stimulated the development of an interdisciplinary approach to Native history in

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[24] John S. Milloy's *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988) was significant. But it remained unpublished until 1988.

[25] Anthony McGinnis's *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains 1738-1889* (Evergreen: Cordillera Press, 1990) does not supplant Secoy's earlier work.

[26] A milestone article in this process was E. E. Rich, "Trade Habits and Economic Motivation among the Indians of North America," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 26 (1960): 35-53.

North America. This was especially true for the northern plains because of the relocation of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) from London, to Winnipeg, in 1970. Monographs published by Arthur J. Ray, Jennifer Brown, and Sylvia Van Kirk exemplify the groundbreaking research conducted during the 1970s.[27] These were very broad surveys that focussed on social, political, and economic relations between Natives and newcomers. Given the broad temporal and geographic scope of these studies, the researchers necessarily generalized about "Indian" behaviour. Although none of these studies focuses on the northwestern plains, and all of them centre on the fur trade, they are foundational for the study of the history of Native people of the entire northern plains during the bison era, and milestones in the historiography of the Natives in the fur trade of North America.

During the 1970s and 1980s Native historians turned from traditional approaches and themes towards ethnohistorical methods and debates. This meant that they now sought historical materials to study the complex processes of cultural change and continuity among specific ethnic groups.[28] They often debated the importance of Native - Euroamerican contact in these processes.[29] Scholars also often tried to explain the processes of "acculturation" by which one group adopted cultural traits of another community.[30]

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[27] Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980); Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); and David J. Wishart's, *The Fur Trade of the American West 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979) is more focussed on the fur trade as an aspect of Euroamerican history than are the others. For a survey of fur trade historiography in this crucial decade, see Sylvia Van Kirk, "Fur Trade Social History: Some Recent Trends," in Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray, eds., *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 160-73.

The dominance of ethnohistory is understandable. Anthropological concepts of ethnicity and acculturation were well-suited to the types of questions scholars were inclined to ask of the historical record. Furthermore, ethnohistorians lent Native historiography most of its vitality in these years. On the other hand, ethnohistorical scholarship focussed exclusively on questions of Native culture history. Unfortunately then, scholars have not yet applied the sophisticated understandings of the structure of

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[28] Those particularly relevant to the northern plains include Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada: 1780 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994); Frederick Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Milloy's *The Plains Cree*, although published in 1988, was completed in the early 1970s.

[29] See especially Paul C. Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1986).

[30] John Collier's Bureau of Indian Affairs encouraged the study of acculturation. In early 1935 Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits were appointed to a committee, sponsored by the United States Social Science Research Council to study acculturation. Some fur trade historians have found the concept helpful because, as Ralph Linton described it, it distinguished between directed cultural change, where power relations were very unequal, and "social-cultural fusion" (non-directed cultural change), where Native communities themselves determined the direction of cultural change. See Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits. "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," *American Anthropologist*, 38 (1936): 149-52; Melville J. Herskovits, *Acculturation, A Study of Culture Contact*. (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, [1938] 1958); but especially, Ralph Linton, ed., *Acculturation in Seven American Tribes* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1940). Linton's discussion of directed change and social-cultural fusion can be found on pp. 501-20.

Native societies that have developed since 1970 to important aspects of Native history, including the history of economic, military, and diplomatic relations among Native groups of the northwestern plains.

Beyond the Limits of the Culture Concept

While scholars have debated the usefulness of the term *ethnohistory* in recent years, culturalist assumptions have not yet come under serious scrutiny.[31] Perhaps this is because ethnohistorians and the culture idea have contributed so substantially to our understanding of Native history. Still, the narrow focus of ethnohistory upon culture history tends now to hamper innovation. When taken to an extreme, culturalism becomes cultural determinism. The obviously unsatisfying results mean that determinist scholarship is rare.[32] More often, the limits of ethnohistorical scholarship do not arise from the errors or deficiencies of particular studies so much as from its orientation towards cultural themes. For example, ethnohistorians have tended to isolate themes in Native-newcomer interaction from the context of Native-Native relations, to emphasize long-term culture history at the expense of short-term event history, and to organize their research around ethnic groups rather than bioregions or other possible organizing schemes. A contextualist approach now calls for studies that address different themes in alternate ways. The present study is intended to take the historiography of the northwestern plains beyond some of the most persistent themes.

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[31] The term "ethnohistory" has come under considerable attack primarily because of concern that the term and its definitions, which suggested that there was a peculiar method to the study of nonliterate and non-Western peoples, were tending to ghettoize its practitioners. Some have argued that the term should be replaced, while others have simply suggested dropping the distinction between ethnohistory and history. James Merrell, "Some Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1989): 115; Krech, "The State of Ethnohistory," 345-75; Shepard Krech III, "Ethnohistory," David Levinson and Melvin Ember, eds., *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 422-9.

[32] See Mark A. Judy, "Powder Keg on the Upper Missouri: Sources of Blackfeet Hostility, 1730-1810," *American Indian Quarterly* 11 (1987): 127-44, which argues that Blackfoot hostility towards people from the United States after 1806 can be explained by "the arrival of British and Canadian traders on the northern plains [which] disrupted Blackfeet customs and beliefs, leaving the tribe uncertain, suspicious, and hostile" (130).

Notwithstanding the changing emphases in Native historiography in this century, the history of Native-newcomer relations has remained one of the most persistent scholarly themes. In the early twentieth century, historians who emphasized the Euroamerican dimensions of the fur trade were addressing the central historiographical questions of their day even as they capitalized on the strength of the available documents. In the 1970s, new Native historians and ethnohistorians turned to the Native aspects of Native-newcomer relations, topics upon which the fur trade documents could also be expected to shed considerable light. The new emphases dramatically changed the scholarly portrayal of Natives in the fur trade. We now understand that the mutually beneficial relationships that developed between Native communities and Euroamerican fur traders were marked by considerable accommodation. Native cultures exhibited remarkable cultural continuity. Any exploration of these relationships benefits from an understanding of the middle ground and the "middle peoples" that existed between them.[33] Still, we should not assume that Native-newcomer relations were at the centre of

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[33] The allusion is to the acclaimed book by Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). There, White used the term *middle ground*, a late twentieth century replacement for *frontier*, to describe the process of accommodation that occurred between Euroamericans and Natives in certain contexts. White's book contrasts

Native life on the northwestern plains before 1806. Euroamericans did become significant in the history of the region. After their arrival they forged important social relations with some of their Native trading partners, especially Cree and Assiniboine bands. With others, like the Blackfoot and Atsina, relations were generally restricted to brief and expedient trading encounters. We cannot hope to explain Native-newcomer relations adequately unless we attempt to understand them in the context of broader Native interactions. On the northwestern plains before 1806, the emergence and persistence of any "middle ground" between Natives and newcomers existed within the common and contested ground. Euroamericans became influential but relatively powerless participants in the ancient, dynamic, and complex patterns of trade, diplomacy, and warfare among the many communities that inhabited the region. This study focuses on the history of human interaction generally, rather than on Native-newcomer relations specifically, and it emphasizes the political, diplomatic, military, and environmental dimensions of this history.

It is also important to reconcile the significance of event and individual with the importance of structure and culture. Ethnohistorians usually aim to describe and explain

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starkly with the historiography of United States Indian policy of which Francis Paul Prucha is the doyen. Those wishing to understand White's work in its historiographic context should consult Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*; Brown, *Strangers in Blood*; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*; Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties"*; and Jacqueline Peterson, "Many Roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680-1815" in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, eds., *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985). This literature shows that historians have long explored this middle ground. It also explores the role (neglected in *The Middle Ground*) that the Métis as "middle people" played both in the *pays d'en haut* and elsewhere.

gradual change in fundamental aspects of culture over the long term. Only rarely do they discuss prominent individuals or significant milestones. This is not only because of the weaknesses of the documentary evidence, but also because of the devaluation of individuals and events in anthropological history. Some scholars have assumed that the event and the individual can have had only a small impact on long-term culture history. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, one of the most prominent critics of structuralist scholarship, has struggled against the false dualism between structure and circumstance. An event, according to Sahlins, is "at once a sui generis phenomenon with its own force, shape, and causes, and the significance these qualities acquire in the cultural context."[34] A rediscovery of *evenemential* history requires the rediscovery of the role of events and individuals in Native history. Certain influential leaders on the northwestern plains have had great influence over the course of events in the region.[35] Unfortunately, much of the documentary evidence does not shed significant light on this role. Most of the documents were addressed to Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) officials in London who would not have sought, or benefited from detailed information about individual Natives. Correspondence among fellow traders, however, frequently does mention individuals, and traders clearly made it their business to get to know Natives individually. During the winter of 1778-9, British surveyor Philip Turnor observed the HBC traders at work in the Lower Saskatchewan River region. He noted that "there is not an Indian in that part of the Country but Mr Willm Tomison or Robt Longmore [Longmoor] or both of them is acquainted with and many of them not known by any other of Your Honors Servants and the Indians seem very fond of them both."[36] Turnor observed what was clearly the case throughout the fur trade era — that fur traders cultivated the friendship and respect of Native leaders, for their success depended on the cooperation of a few leading men. Discussing a much later era, Hugh A. Dempsey of the Glenbow Institute in Calgary proved how an appreciation of particular leading individuals is key to understanding the history of a broader Native community.[37] Despite the weakness of the documentary evidence, scholars must avoid an approach that considers events and individuals "as merely surface disturbances, foam on the great tides of history."[38] Attention to individuals and events will not obscure what is essential to an understanding of the past; it will clarify it.

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[34] Marshall Sahlins, "The Return of the Event, Again; With Reflections on the Beginnings of the Great Fijian War of 1843 to 1855 between the Kingdoms of Bau and Rewa," Aletta Biersack, ed., *Clio in Oceania: Toward a Historical Anthropology* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991), 44-5. Also see Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1985); Marshall Sahlins, "Captain Cook at Hawaii," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 98 (1989): 371-423.

[35] Theodore Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands, 1794-1815," *Canadian Historical Review* 77 (1996): 1-32.

Scholars have not only focussed on Native-newcomer relations and on nonevent history; they have also remained remarkably loyal to the old genre of "tribal history." In the 1970s, scholars often found themselves generalizing about "Indian" behaviour in a certain region and period. As subsequent historians elaborated on these broad surveys, they increasingly organized their studies around particular cultural groups. This is not surprising. Because the historical documents usually facilitate identification of cultural groups, and because the research questions centred on issues of cultural change, scholars found it natural to focus studies on cultural groups. As a result, earlier generalizations about Native behaviour have now been refined and elaborated. Unfortunately, the organizing scheme, itself a product of culturalist interpretations, tends also to reify culturalist assumptions. The danger now has become that, unless tribal histories acknowledge the complexity and limitations of Native ethnicity and culture, they will impoverish our understanding of the past as much as they will enrich it.

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[36] J. B. Tyrrell, ed. *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1934), 253.

[37] Dempsey has used biography as the means to explain the history of Native groups during the early reserve era. Exemplary studies include Hugh A. Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972); *Red Crow: Warrior Chief* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980); and *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984).

[38] Sahlins, "The Return of the Event, Again," 38.

Culturally defined studies should be accompanied by alternatively organized studies. Environmentally defined studies are rare today, despite their obvious potential. Arthur Ray organized his *Indians in the Fur Trade* around the history of the prairie-forest ecotone of the northeastern plains — a region whose ethnic diversity mirrored its environmental diversity. The details of Ray's model of human and wildlife annual cycles on the margins of the northern plains remain the subject of debate, but his study proves that the ecological diversity and the natural cycles of the ecotone exerted a significant influence upon its human history. The historical geographer's keen sense of the significance of place and environment on human history is one of the major contributions of Ray's work, and the work of other historical geographers. Strangely, although the prominent place of Ray's work in the historiography is acknowledged, few have recognized the significance of its organizing scheme, and few have emulated it.[39] Meanwhile, the potential for multidisciplinary and collaborative work in environmental and Native history has been neglected.

Ray's *Indians in the Fur Trade* explores the history of a region for which the documentary record is strong, since that region was important to fur traders. The present study focuses on the northwestern plains. The documentary record may at first seem to militate against a history of the northwestern plains before 1806. Those who generated the documentary evidence overwhelmingly occupied posts on the North Saskatchewan River, on the very edge of the plains. Few fur traders travelled through the region. Still, the documents suggest that fur traders quickly perceived that all of the residents of the northwestern plains were closely linked. Although fur traders had very little contact with the Flathead, Kutenai, Crow, or "Snake" before 1806, they learned of them soon after they made sustained contact with the Blackfoot. Then, they continuously gathered and recorded information about these distant Natives because this information seemed so vital to their understanding of those plains Natives with whom they traded. Archaeological and scientific evidence also suggests that the northwestern plains were an environmental unit. Several archaeological phases appear to have expanded to the edges of the northwestern plains, but not beyond it.[40] The scientific literature reenforces the impression that the northwestern plains form a unique environmental province of the

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[39] Dan Flores, "Place: An Argument for Bioregional History," *Environmental History Review* 18 (Winter 1994): 1-18.

[40] These phases did expand to the eastward where the border of the northwestern plains is indistinct.

Great Plains. Bioregional approaches hold significant promise for historians of North America.

The present study addresses evidence, topics, and questions that ethnohistorical scholarship often neglects. It is also intended to avoid mistaken impressions that tribal histories can engender. Tribal histories tend to create and sustain an erroneous belief that cultural units corresponded to social, political, and economic units. Criticism of the concept of *tribe* began in earnest during the late 1960s.[41] As early as 1974, Susan R. Sharrock argued that "the concept of 'tribe' has acted as a procustrean bed for the generation of interethnic theory, and that theory is inadequate to explain the relationships among ethnic units that are historically documented."[42] Only recently have some scholars shown a resolve to move beyond their traditional emphasis on cultural groups. In *this* respect, Richard White's *The Middle Ground* is important.[43] White and others have not only shown the limitations of tribal histories, but they have also demonstrated the potential of studies that acknowledge the importance of ethnic groups without overlooking those relationships that were important *within* ethnic groups, and those relationships that were important *among* them.

We can understand relations among Native communities only if we appreciate that

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[41] June Helm ed., *Essays on the Problem of Tribe: Proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968).

[42] Susan R. Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines, and Assiniboines: Interethnic Social Organization of the Far Northern Plains," *Ethnohistory* 21 (1974): 96.

[43] See White, *Middle Ground*, xiv for a discussion.

Native bands were complex organized societies. It would be a fundamental error to conceive of band societies as "primitive" or "simple" societies — akin to conceptions of humanity "in the state of nature."[44] Band societies may appear deceptively simple, even unorganized, because they lack the formal institutions that state societies possess. Nevertheless, band societies accomplish through informal means exactly what state societies accomplish in other ways. Indeed, the flexibility, fluidity, and informality of band societies equipped them to respond quickly and effectively to the rapidly changing circumstances that they typically faced.

Bands on the northwestern plains, as elsewhere, were organized around extended families. In many ways these families functioned as extended families do anywhere. A person rose to prominence and maintained this position according to his reputation among other members of a band, and, to a degree, among members of affiliated bands. Leadership carried with it no formal title and no power, only influence in proportion to this reputation. Although it refers to leadership among the Shoshoni specifically, the following passage from the journals of Captain Meriwether Lewis and William Clark apply to band societies generally:

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[44] The following description of the band societies of the northwestern plains is the product of impressions gained from the documentary evidence, but is also informed by the following important sources: Roger C. Owen, "The Patrilocal Band: A Linguistically and Culturally Hybrid Social Unit," *American Anthropologist* 67 (1965): 675-90; June Helm, "Bilaterality in the Socio-Territorial Organization of the Arctic Drainage Dene," *Ethnology* 4 (1965): 361-85; Colin M. Turnbull, "the Importance of Flux in Two Hunting Societies," Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore, *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968); David Damas, *Contributions to Anthropology: Band Societies* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1969); Joel S. Savishinsky, "Mobility as an Aspect of Stress in an Arctic Community," *American Anthropologist* 73(1971): 604-18; Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure: An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 14-18; June Helm, "Introduction," in June Helm, ed., *Subarctic*, vol. 6 of William G. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1981); Hugh A. Dempsey, "The Blackfoot Indians," in R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, eds., *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986); Patricia C. Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War: Contrasting Forms of Intertribal Relationship among Historic Plains Indians," John H. Moore, ed., *The Political Economy of North American Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 94-132; and John H. Moore, "Putting Anthropology Back Together Again: The Ethnogenetic Critique of Cladistic Theory," *American Anthropologist* 96 (1994): 925-48.

> the authority of the Cheif [*sic*] [is] nothing more than mere admonition supported by the influence which the propriety of his own examplery [*sic*] conduct may have acquired him in the minds of the individuals who compose the band. the title of cheif is not hereditary, nor can I learn that there is any cerimony [*sic*] of instalment, or other epoch in the life of a Cheif from which his title as such can be dated. in fact every man is a chief, but all have not an equal influence on the minds of the other members of the community, and he who happens to enjoy the greatest share of confidence is the principal Chief.[45]

While band leaders wielded no coercive power, they could exert significant influence over members of their bands and even over groups of bands. This influence could cross ethnic boundaries.

Band membership was fluid. Any member of a band was free to leave one band and join another. This fluidity did not threaten, but ensured, the stability of bands. Poorly equipped to deal with conflict and division, bands had many informal means to arrive at consensus. Dissenting individuals, for instance, were encouraged to acquiesce rather than to agitate when they were in disagreement with a majority of band members. Dissenters could always "vote with their feet" by joining another band, either temporarily or permanently when circumstances became difficult. Often, they left when bands also separated after camping together for a time. Every band member inevitably had family members in other bands, so the move from one band to another would not be difficult. Unhampered movement meant that local bands could emerge, grow, wane, and disappear over time. Despite apparent individualism, bands also exhibited a strong sense of community. Individuals were acutely aware that their survival depended on their membership in a community. This knowledge itself induced individuals to place the needs of the community ahead of personal interests, but members of band societies also feared selfishness to such a degree that they reserved harsh social sanctions to discourage it. Moreover, only people with an established reputation of generosity could ever expect to rise to a position of prominence.

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[45] Gary E. Moulton, ed., *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983-97), 19 August 1805 (5: 119-20).

Just as individual freedom existed in tension with obligations of kin, band autonomy on the northwestern plains existed in tension with larger allegiances.[46] Especially during the equestrian era, bands found it essential to cooperate to achieve common aims. Occasions for combined action ranged from communal bison hunts, and religious ceremonies, to war expeditions. No band could survive long on the northwestern plains without cooperative relations with other bands. Local bands were tied to other bands in several ways. Ethnicity was an important unifying factor. For instance, the fact that they spoke the same language, shared similar beliefs and customs, and shared a common history, tied all Crow bands together. The destiny of all bands of a particular ethnic group was also connected because the behaviour of particular bands affected other bands of the same group. A Blackfoot band might attack any Crow band in retaliation for an attack by a particular Crow band. This meant that the relationships between all Crow bands and all Blackfoot bands tended to be similar. Certain leaders and bands could break established patterns, but if they pursued very different policies towards neighbours over the long term, nonconforming bands either had to establish new patterns of relationships among all bands, or to establish a separate identity.

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[46] The bands on the northwestern plains, particularly in the equestrian era, were far larger than were bands in the subarctic. Under such circumstances certain functions, such as policing functions, were more formal than they were within smaller bands. This has led Marshall Sahlins to describe them as "segmentary tribes"; Marshall Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), 20-1. As important, however, is the fact that these larger local bands were more closely tied to other bands of the same ethnicity than were bands in the subarctic.

All bands were tied together with others by networks of kinship. These kin relations naturally existed among bands of the same ethnicity. So, members of any Shoshoni band always had brothers, sisters, parents, children, aunts, uncles, and relations by marriage in other Shoshoni bands. A sense of reciprocal obligations accompanied kinship. When a particular band was unsuccessful in the hunt, or feared attack by enemies, it could count on the assistance of neighbouring kin. Distressed bands expected aid from kin even as more fortunate bands assisted their families. Kinship demanded reciprocity.

Recognition of the reality of band societies opens the way to new insights. It also, however, places before the researcher some very real obstacles. Bruce G. Trigger, in discussing theoretical issues in the study of Native history, has described how generalizations about culture may lead to distortion: "members of the same culture may decide to pursue goals diametrically opposed to one another, either because the individuals occupy different positions in the society and therefore have different personal interests or because for idiosyncratic reasons they perceive the situation that they are confronting differently."[47] In an ideal world, then, historians would discover and interpret Native history at the level of the individual and the local band. Trigger acknowledged, however, that "only rarely is enough historical information available about nonliterate peoples to permit historians to understand behaviour at the level of the individual."[48] Still, Trigger challenged scholars not to throw up their hands in despair:

> it is possible to do more at the level of the interest group, as this concept has been defined implicitly or explicitly by sociologists and historians. . . . By carefully analysing historical documents, in favourable situations the ethnohistorian can define the more significant interest groups, native and White, and offer reasonable explanations for why they behaved as they did. These explanations seek to account for reciprocal interactions in which competing interest groups sought to achieve their own goals or to thwart those of opponents. It must not be forgotten, however, that, as a result of idiosyncrasies or for personal reasons, an individual may not adhere to the interest group to which he or she is expected to belong.[49]

To the extent that the evidence allows, the historian ought to aim to understand the ways individuals and communities from within a single cultural group responded very differently to circumstances. Even when we do not find evidence of these different responses, by acknowledging that cultural groups were not monolithic entities we can do much to improve our understanding of the surviving evidence.

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[47] Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, 169.

[48] Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, 169.

[49] Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, 169-170. Trigger defines interest groups as "specific groupings that emerge within societies as a result of common interests shared by people in concrete historical situations. . . . for such a group to be valid, its members must at least implicitly have shared common goals and supported one another in collective actions."

Emphasis on cultural groups not only tends to obscure the important network of relationships that existed within cultures, but it also neglects important connections among groups. Scholars who define their studies culturally almost inevitably focus on evidence relevant to the history of specific cultures. The informed reader is likely to conclude that the boundaries between cultural groups were relatively solid and impermeable. This would be a mistake.[50] It has led, in the past, to debates about which ethnic group a certain Euroamerican met on a certain occasion. The documentary evidence for the northwestern plains offers ample evidence of contact, mixing, merging, and amalgamation among cultural groups. It was routine for a single encampment to include members of several local bands belonging to several cultures. So, when Anthony Henday met a large encampment of Natives in 1754, it almost certainly included Blood, Blackfoot, and Peigan. It likely also included Atsina. HBC employee Peter Fidler, recorded that, at one time during the winter of 1792-3, Sakatow's Peigan band camped together with Blood, Siksika, Sarcee, and Cree bands all at once. Soon afterwards, Sakatow's band also visited with Shoshoni and Kutenai bands. The scholarly literature does not reflect the fact that combined encampments (Crow-Shoshoni, Shoshoni-Flathead, Cree-Sarcee, Sarcee-Blood, Siksika-Assiniboine, and Assiniboine-Cree) were normal. This is odd, for fur trade journals often mention mixed bands.[51] They were not incidental to Native life, but were important to the maintenance of interethnic cooperation. Often, mixed encampments were temporary meetings of distinct and autonomous communities. Interethnic contact though, was not limited to temporary encounters. Boundaries between Native groups were always permeable and occasionally indistinct. Little prevented an individual born within one ethnic group from becoming a prominent leader in another. Indeed, the frequency with which this happened suggests that interethnicity was very common and that persons with a mixed heritage were particularly suited to leadership roles, especially when diplomacy became important.[52] Evidence from around the world has shown that "many band societies are bi- or multilingual and highly diverse in regard to general cultural content."[53] Where mixing, intermarriage, and movement of individuals between ethnic groups became common, the boundaries between them could become indistinct. On the northern plains, the long term coalition that developed among Algonquian-speaking Cree and Siouian-speaking Assiniboine bands of the northern plains produced a merged identity. Some bands were neither Cree nor Assiniboine, but were interethnic.[54]

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[50] John Moore has explained that "I do not know of any kinship schedules, or explicitly stated patterns of exogamy, that are predicated on marriage with foreigners, although it takes place in all societies I know about"; Moore, "Putting Anthropology Back Together Again," 935.

[51] John H. Moore has argued that this is true of all North American Native groups, Moore, "Putting Anthropology Back Together Again," especially 934-6.

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[52] For example, Saukamappee, (Young Man), born among the Cree, became a prominent Peigan chief. Old Star, a prominent Plains Assiniboine, was born among the Kutenai; and Hugh Munro, born in Montreal, and Jimmy Jock Bird, of mixed English-Cree heritage, became prominent in Peigan bands as adults. Munro died on the Blackfeet Reservation in the 1890s. This ability of mixed-background individuals to serve as brokers between communities seems to have been persistent. During the transition from bison hunting to reserve life many prominent leaders were interethnic. Of the prominent Natives of the treaty era we know that Big Bear was Oji-Cree; Minahikosis (Little Pine) born around 1830, was Blackfoot-Cree; Paskwa was a Cree-born leader of the Plains Saulteaux; and Poundmaker, a prominent Plains Cree leader, was the son of a Stoney and the adopted son of Siksika leader, Crowfoot. For other examples see Patricia C. Albers, "Changing Patterns of Ethnicity in the Northeastern Plains, 1780-1870" Jonathan D. Hill, ed., *History, Power, and Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Americas, 1492-1992* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996, 112-113. Richard White notes that these permeable ethnic boundaries were also a feature of Natives in the *pays d'en haut*, White, *Middle Ground*, 392.

[53] Owen, "The Partilocal Band," 675.

How then, can we understand the relationship among Native bands? Band societies differed markedly from Western societies in many ways that few Euroamerican fur traders ever seem to have understood fully. Relations between human communities on the northwestern plains exhibited much of, and owed much to, the complexity, fluidity, and flexibility that were unique and essential to the Native bands. For this reason, we are wise to describe patterns of Native interaction with terms that do not carry significant Eurocentric connotations. The term *alliance*, with its connotations of established protocol, permanence, and formality, is inadequate to describe any of the relations on the northwestern plains, regardless of how friendly or longstanding they were. Terms such as *coalition*, *affiliation*, and *association* capture the essence of these relationships far more accurately. Coalitions, even if longstanding, were fluid and temporary, in need of constant renewal and maintenance. They were expedient combinations in which distinct and autonomous groups worked towards specific aims, but which did not necessarily entail reciprocity. Thus, even within longstanding coalitions, bands could and did endure hostile incidents, even bloodshed and death. If one partner in a coalition was much weaker militarily than another, it would be vulnerable to occasional raids of its partner. Conversely, longstanding enmities could be punctuated by peaceful and cooperative encounters. "Inveterate foes" could not only engage in peaceful trade, but could join to wage war on a third party that might normally be at peace with one of the others. This might imply no efforts at long-term rapprochement; it could signify nothing more than the fact that two normally hostile bands judged that at a certain time peaceful relations, even cooperation in warfare, suited their interests better than warring against one another did.

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[54] Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines, and Assiniboines," 95-122.

The Evidence

By embracing complexity and paradox, not by avoiding it, a contextualist history of Native peoples can be written. Such an approach requires not only anthropological and documentary research but multidisciplinary inquiry that integrates the often sparse and contradictory evidence available from historical sources with relevant knowledge wherever it might be found. Historians of Native people, then, do not seek insights merely from anthropologists, but from researchers in any discipline that might shed light on the past.

The primary evidence also has important limitations. Foremost among the challenges is the fact that Euroamerican fur traders and explorers produced virtually all of the scant documentary evidence. Still, evidence that pertains to the history of the northwestern plains before 1806 is surprisingly valuable. Only a small part of it is in print; most remains unpublished in the vast collection of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) in Winnipeg. Were it not for these documents, a detailed history of this time and place would be impossible.

It is worth noting that Native informants originally provided a significant part of the evidence preserved in the documents. Few Euroamericans travelled any distance from the North Saskatchewan River, and most of those who did were escorted by Native hosts. Thus, almost all the information regarding events and developments in that region ultimately had a Native source. The fur traders acquired much of this information from Blackfoot, Cree, Assiniboine, and Sarcee traders during the customary pre-trade exchange of news. Some of the evidence exists in the form of Native oral histories, traditions, and vocabularies communicated to certain traders who then recorded them in terms they could understand. Some Native maps offer other intriguing information. Clearly, the documentary record is less rich and more biased than we would wish. The original evidence has been filtered by the fur traders who interpreted and recorded parts of it, but it would be a simplification to argue that the documents represent only a Euroamerican perspective of northwestern plains history. Surely the documents must be interpreted with care, but in this respect they are no different from any other historical evidence.

The documents of the HBCA provide only certain kinds of evidence. Historians of the northwestern plains must also rely heavily on anthropological and archaeological knowledge. The work of ethnologists, both amateur and professional, is valuable, although for anyone studying the history of the region before 1806, it presents many interpretive challenges. There were very few archaeological investigations of the region before the 1950s. Although substantial archaeological research has been published in the last decade, our understanding of the evidence remains incomplete and tentative. By contrast, the relevant scientific literature in zoology, ecology, and plant science is large. Combined with the documentary evidence and developments in the field of environmental history, this literature greatly facilitates efforts to reconstruct past environments of the northwestern plains.

The Common and Contested Ground

The theme of the common and contested ground highlights both the tremendous complexity, and the ironies of northwestern plains history. The common and contested ground was at once a geographical region, and an abstract reality. For hunting societies, the resources of the northwestern plains were exceptionally inviting, even as its unforgiving environment cruelly punished the unwary. The desirability of the region meant that no society unable to defend itself could possibly hope to survive there, even as none unwilling to accommodate its neighbours was ever able to maintain its position. Hunting bands continually shared and struggled for access to resources. Some moved in with little or no resistance from prior residents; others did so only with a struggle. Vulnerable groups forged cooperative relationships with others to survive, or were driven from the region. When Euroamerican fur traders began arriving in the eighteenth century, they injected new dynamics to old patterns. Traders lived in separate yet overlapping worlds with the prior Native inhabitants. They fought, often violently, amongst themselves, yet came as self-styled peacemakers to the Natives. Despite their own antagonisms, competing traders often built their posts within common stockades to better defend themselves from the Natives. Then, they sought to make common cause with these Native bands. They were practically powerless to direct the behaviour of their trading partners, yet they unleashed powerful forces that left no Native inhabitant of the region untouched. They came as peacemakers, but their arrival led to intensified warfare. By 1806 Euroamericans seemed overwhelmed by the crucible of the northwestern plains.

Perhaps a middle ground emerged between the Native inhabitants and non-Native newcomers, but more important, the Euroamericans were important but militarily relatively powerless participants in the complex patterns of trade, warfare, politics, and diplomacy on the northwestern plains.

Scholars increasingly understand that while nature does not simply determine the shape human communities will take, environment does place upon groups and individuals a set of constraints within which they can act.[55] The best research in environmental history today is aimed at discovering how human communities have responded to the limitations and possibilities offered by their surroundings. Developments in this field have the potential to enrich significantly our understanding of the history of the indigenous peoples of North America. They make it clear that an understanding of the environment of the northwestern plains is essential to an understanding of the Native societies that occupied it. The northern mixed prairie, with its unique mix of warm and cool season, short and mid grasses, and the crescent of fescue prairies that borders it, made the northwestern plains a unique environmental province of the Great Plains. It is also clear that Native people had a sophisticated understanding of the opportunities and limitations of their homelands. They certainly understood the bison. The first two chapters set the environmental context of northwestern plains history. The first argues that the northwestern plains were particularly favoured for nomadic bison hunters, and it explores the implications of this understanding for our efforts to reconstruct the history of human interaction. The second explains how, during the late pedestrian and early equestrian eras, nomadic hunting societies tended to respond to the seasonal movements of bison. For hunting bands, the advantages of conforming to the annual cycles, if not the absolute need to do so, were sufficiently important that they have always influenced patterns of human interaction on the northwestern plains.

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[55] See Alfred W. Crosby, "The Past and Present of Environmental History," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1183.

Two chapters examine the history of the northwestern plains during the late pedestrian era, the period between the arrival of bow and arrow technology to the arrival of horses. The third chapter describes the deep and dynamic history of trade, warfare, and diplomacy. The fourth discusses the history of ethnic groups during the last years of the pedestrian era and the first of the equestrian era.

The last four chapters trace the history of the northwestern plains from the arrival of the horse in the early eighteenth century, to 1806, a year that ushered in dramatic changes in the lives of every inhabitant of the region. Although they were punctuated by the arrival of Euroamerican fur traders and devastating epidemics, those years were marked by the emergence, entrenchment, and deterioration of two broad coalitions of bands on the northwestern plains. The southern coalition, dominated first by the Shoshoni, but later by the Crow bands, experienced its greatest dominance during the early equestrian era. The northern coalition, dominated by Plains Cree, Plains Assiniboine, and Blackfoot bands, either emerged in response to, or was solidified by, the threat of the southern coalition. Strengthened by access to firearms, the northern coalition not only met, but turned back the southern bands. By the turn of the nineteenth century the northern coalition so dominated the northwestern plains that, had the situation not changed, all the bands of the southern coalition may well have been expelled from the region. By that time, however, circumstances were already changing. The northern coalition had become increasingly fragile as internal conflicts foreshadowed the rupture that occurred in 1806. In those same years, improved access to guns enabled the bands of the southern coalition better to defend themselves. By 1806 every band of the southern coalition could look forward confidently to direct access to firearms.

Chapter One
The Northwestern Plains: "A Perfect Oasis"?

> The Crow country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place; while you are in it you fare well; whenever you go out of it, whichever way you travel you fare worse. If you go to the south, you have to wander over great barren plains; the water is warm and bad and you meet with fever and ague. To the north it is cold; the winters are long and bitter and there is no grass; you can not keep horses there but must travel with dogs. What is a country without horses? On the Columbia they are poor and dirty, paddle about in canoes and eat fish. ... fish is poor food. To the east they dwell in villages; they live well, but they drink the muddy waters of the Missouri — that is bad.
>
> Arapooash (Sore Belly), prominent Crow leader, *c.* 1830[1]

The hundreds of Euroamerican settlers who watched their crops and dreams wither in the sun and wind during the 1930s, would have scorned Sore Belly's appraisal of the northwestern plains. Many of the homes that settlers abandoned decades ago now stand as silent, bleached monuments to the hopes that died there. Even today, the core of the region remains a vast, nearly treeless and sparsely populated region of large ranches and small towns. Substantial cities have grown only along its more forgiving margins. Those who stayed and prospered never seem to have lost their awe of the stark landscape, the immense but miserly sky, and the fierce climate of violent contrasts.

It is a landscape dominated by the apparently lifeless shades of yellow, brown, and white. Greenery passes quickly. Summer or winter, however, the sun and the wind are relentless. The January sun is a mere irony, but the midsummer sun defies all vegetation. And the wind, that nearly ceaseless wind, makes the climate of the northwestern plains what it is. The wind subjects the region to the most sudden weather changes on the globe. The chinook winds can quickly drive midwinter temperatures well above freezing.

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[1] As recorded by James H. Bradley, "Lieut. James H. Bradley Manuscript," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* 9 (1923): 304.

Equally impressive, and far more dangerous, are the northerly winds that can suddenly plunge the region into a protracted deep freeze.

Today, irrigation permits intensive agriculture on some of the drier portions of the northwestern plains. On others, farmers have developed sophisticated dryland farming techniques that coax harvests from the region's arid soils, but sprawling cattle ranches now dominate the arid core of the northwestern plains. How then is it that Sore Belly spoke so highly of the territory when so many Euroamerican migrants fled it? Certainly it was because Euroamericans brought traditional and ill-suited eastern agricultural practices and technologies to the high plains while Sore Belly's people, whose roots were also among agricultural societies towards the east, had never made a significant effort to import agricultural methods to the region. Sore Belly's people valued the northwestern plains as a bison oasis.

Documentary evidence, combined with scientific literature, suggests that Sore Belly was correct. Aspects of the topography, vegetation, and climate of the northwestern plains made them a virtual oasis for bison and other large ungulates, and made it easier for humans to subsist on bison there than in most other areas on the Great Plains. Native societies understood this fact, and also understood how to manage and manipulate the environment to maximize its ability to support bison.

It is very difficult to estimate how many bison lived on the plains at any given time because both the free-roaming herds of bison and the native grasses that supported them have largely vanished from the Great Plains. We do know that much of the Great Plains supported sufficient numbers of bison to sustain sophisticated hunting societies.

We also know that bison numbers varied temporally, both in the long term and the short term. Different climate regimes significantly affected bison numbers. In the shorter term, dramatic weather anomalies could also drastically affect bison populations. Numbers also varied regionally, and it is this regional variation in the density of bison populations that is of particular interest here.

Among the most useful ecological studies of human history on the Great Plains is Douglas Bamforth's *Ecology and Human Organization on the Great Plains* (1988). This study convincingly shows that a thorough understanding of regional variations in the environment of the plains is essential to our understanding of the region's human inhabitants. Bamforth argued that because forage production was generally highest on the northeastern prairies and lower south and west of there (although he noted that the Black Hills were a crucial exception), bison were more plentiful, their herds more evenly distributed, and their movements more predictable on the northeastern plains than anywhere else.[2] These factors, he argued, meant that human communities could be generally larger and more sedentary on the northeastern plains than elsewhere. Since larger communities tend to have a military advantage over smaller ones, Bamforth argued that northeastern groups tended to supplant those to their southwest. He noted that the Dakota were an exception because, based on the bison oasis of the Black Hills, they could maintain their dominance in the west central plains.

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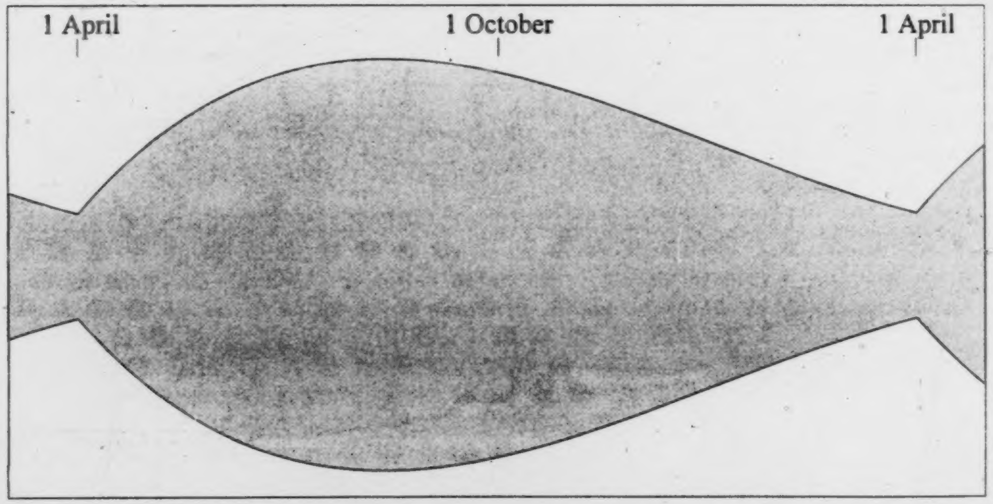
[2] Douglas B. Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization on the Great Plains* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 53-84. Most scholars now agree that the southern plains were not a particularly good bison habitat, Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *The Journal of American History* 78 (1991): 469-71.

Bamforth recognized that bison density in a given area was not limited by total yearly forage production, but by the carrying capacity of that area during the leanest period of the year. What he did not acknowledge was the fact that it was the total available nutrients, not the total available forage, during the critical period of the year, that is most important for understanding bison population dynamics in a region. The distinction is critical. Bison populations peaked during the calving season in spring but declined throughout the year as predators, natural hazards, and starvation took their toll (Figure 1.1). Forage abundance might differ significantly from forage availability and quality particularly in late winter and early spring when bison were under the greatest

Figure 1.1
Variation in the Availability of Nutrients for Foragers on the Northwestern Plains



The shaded area suggests how the nutrients available to a bison population varied during the course of a typical year.. Food supplies declined during the fall and winter producing an "hourglass" through which only a certain portion of the bison population could fit. The "hourglass" had important implications for the human population as well.

stress. For example, while forage might be most abundant on the northeastern plains, in other regions it was of considerably higher quality during the critical period of the year. It would be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to quantify differences in available nutrients, but a close look suggests that various aspects of the environment of the northwestern plains allowed them to sustain unusually large populations of bison and large populations of human hunting groups dependent upon them.

Topography

The topography of the northwestern plains (Figure 0.1, p. 2) offers certain advantages to bison and humans. The northwestern plains are generally undulating, but are roughest and highest near the Rocky Mountains. The imposing Rocky Mountains (known by the Blackfoot as "the backbone") are the source of most of the rivers on the Plains. A low divide runs roughly east-west near the present-day United States-Canadian border. Rivers to the north of this divide flow into the Saskatchewan River system and ultimately into the Hudson Bay; those to the south flow into the Missouri River and ultimately into the Gulf of Mexico. Highlands along this divide include the Milk River Ridge and the Cypress Hills. Although the climate of much of the region is semiarid, the substantial rivers are fed by the abundant snows of the Rocky Mountains, and the uneven terrain forms catchments for run off. The large rivers and their major tributaries occupy wide and deep sheltering valleys etched into the northwestern plains by the meltwater channels as glaciers receded. These broad valleys are characterized by luxuriant grasses and stands of cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*). The region is also dotted with remarkable highlands. The most important are the Hand Hills, Cypress Hills, Sweetgrass Hills, Bearspaw

Mountains, Highwood Mountains, Big Belt Mountains, Little Belt Mountains, Judith Mountains, and Snowy Mountains. None is as large as the Black Hills, but each, like the Black Hills, offers conditions exceptional for bison. They range in height from a few hundred to a few thousand feet above the surrounding plain. Most are high enough to cause orographic precipitation particularly in May and June when cool moist northeasterly winds are common. For example, in most years the Cypress Hills receive two or three more inches of precipitation during the growing season than do the surrounding plains.[3] Since the higher elevations are also characterized by cooler summer temperatures (thus less evaporation) they support much more robust growth.[4] The Cypress Hills, and Bearspaw mountains, surrounded by dry shortgrass prairie support not only vigorous grass growth but substantial forests that include lodgepole pine, jack pine, white spruce, and douglas fir.[5] Spring heads and creeks in the highlands and in the foothills of the Rockies also make surface water available to foragers when precipitation is scanty.[6] The rough topography with its sheltered areas, catchments, and springs provided particularly good conditions for large herds of bison in the past for the same reason that it provides excellent range pasture for cattle today.[7]

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[3] Robert T. Coupland, "A Reconsideration of Grassland Classification in the Northern Great Plains of North America," *Journal of Ecology*, 49 (1961): 138; Raymond Shannon and Daniel J. Smith, "Observations of the Precipitation Regime of the Cypress Hills Area, Alberta and Saskatchewan," *The Albertan Geographer*, 23 (1987): 33-44

[4] The grasslands of the Cypress Hills have a carrying capacity of two to five times that of the surrounding plains, C.W. Vrooman, G.D. Chattaway, and Andrew Stewart, *Cattle Ranching in Western Canada*, (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, Publication No. 778, 1946) 12; A.W. Bailey, personal communication, 28 October 1996. The Hand Hills produce about four times the forage that the surrounding plains do, A.W. Bailey, personal communication, 28 October 1996.

[5] S.E. Clarke, *et al.*, *An Ecological and Grazing Capacity Study of the Native Grass Pastures in Southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture Publication No. 738, 1942), 6; and Robert L. Taylor, Milton J. Edie, and Charles R. Gritzner, *Montana in Maps* (Bozeman: Montana State University, Big Sky Books, 1974), 23.

Vegetation

Topography, climate, and vegetation are related. The northern mixed prairie, one of the main grassland regions of the Great Plains, dominates the northwestern plains (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). This grassland region consists of two subregions, the xeric mixed grasslands, and the more productive mesic mixed grasslands. In three directions the northern mixed prairie merges with the relatively luxuriant fescue prairie. The boundaries of these regions and subregions are related to topography but determined primarily by the ratio of precipitation to evaporation.[8] Although ecologists have drawn discrete boundaries for each vegetative region, they recognize that each blends imperceptibly into the next as climatic and topographic conditions vary. Moreover, highlands or north facing slopes in the xeric mixed prairie region are likely to be dominated by grasses more typical of the mesic mixed prairie or the fescue grasslands, while a south facing slope in the fescue prairie region may resemble the mixed prairie. The border between the mixed-grass and shortgrass prairie is all the more imperceptible because all the grasses of the xeric mixed prairie are also found in the mesic mixed

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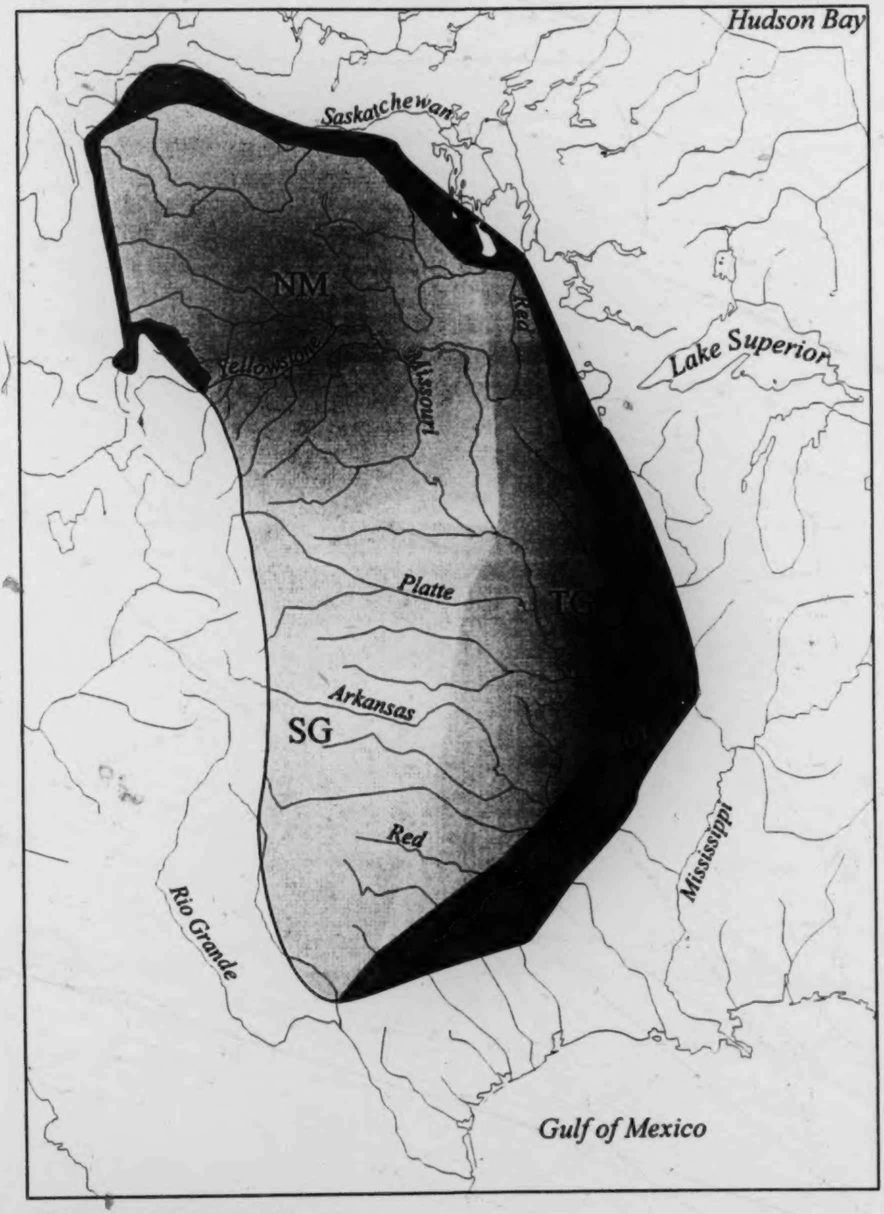
[6] Vrooman, *et al.*, *Cattle Ranching in Western Canada*, 13.

[7] S.E. Clarke, *et al.*, *An Ecological and Grazing Capacity Study*, 6.

[8] S.E. Clarke, E.W. Tisdale, and N.A. Skoglund, *The Effects of Climate and Grazing Practices on Short-Grass Prairie Vegetation in Southern Alberta and Southwestern Saskatchewan* (Ottawa: Canada, Department of Agriculture Publication No. 747, 1947).

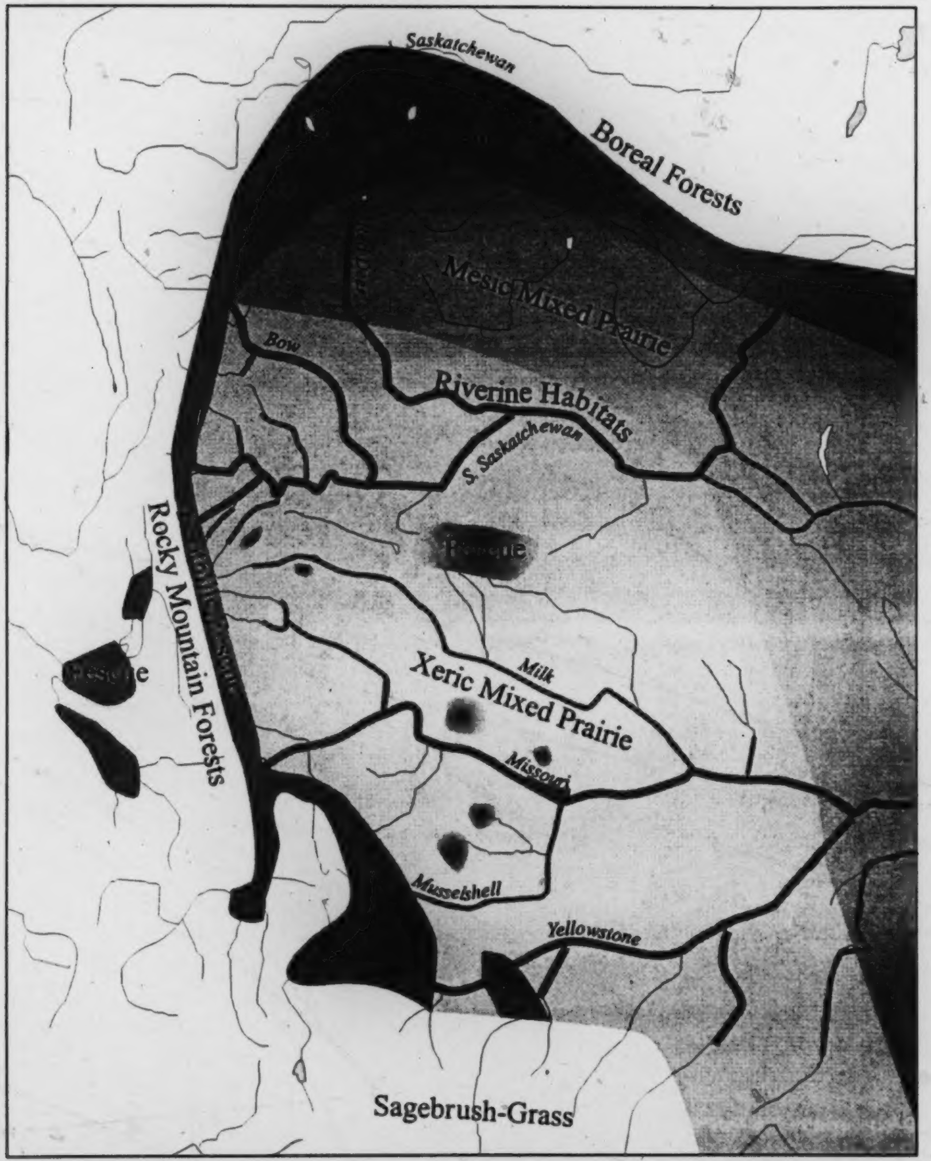
Figure 1.2
Grassland Regions of the Great Plains


Hudson Bay
Saskatchewan
NM
Yellowstone
Missouri
Red
Lake Superior
Platte
TG
Arkansas
SG
Red
Rio Grande
Mississippi
Gulf of Mexico

SG Short Grass Prairie
NM Northern Mixed Prairie
TG Tall Grass Prairie
■ Fescue-Aspen Parkland }
■ Maple-Oak Parkland } Prairie-Forest Ecotones
OS Oak-Hickory Savanna }

Adapted from A.W. Kuchler, *Potential Natural Vegetation of the Coterminous United States* (New York, American Geographical Society, 1964).

Figure 1.3
Grasslands of the Northwestern Plains


Saskatchewan
Boreal Forests
Mesic Mixed Prairie
Bow
Riverine Habitats
S. Saskatchewan
Fescue
Rocky Mountain Forests
Foothills Fescue
Fescue
Milk
Xeric Mixed Prairie
Missouri
Musselshell
Yellowstone
Sagebrush-Grass

The northwestern plains consists of northern mixed prairie in two phases, a xeric phase dominated by warm-season grasses, and a more mesic phase dominated by cool-season grasses. The northwestern plains also includes ample sheltered prairies consisting of a fescue crescent along the periphery of the plains, various uplands that support fescue grasses and sheltering forests, and riverine habitats that support productive grasses and cottonwood forests.

Adapted from A. W. Kuchler, *Potential Natural Vegetation of the Coterminous United States* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1964), Gene F. Payne, *Vegetative Rangeland Types in Montana* (Bozeman: Montana Agricultural Experimental Station, Montana State University, Bulletin 671, 1973), and W. L. Strong and K. R. Leggat, *Ecoregions of Alberta* (Edmonton: Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, 1992).

prairie, but tend to grow taller as the moister and cooler conditions allow.[9] None of these grasslands is as productive as the tallgrass prairies to the east, but for various reasons the region may have sustained a bison population at least as large as the most productive grasslands of the northeastern plains.

In the xeric subregion the growing season begins as early as late March or early April in the region south of the Cypress Hills (the hills themselves not included), reaching a peak in May and June and then declining as the soils dried and the summer temperatures peaked. Thanks to the influence of climate and elevation this is an earlier start to the growing season than is found farther north, east, or west. This early growth meant that the critical period of late winter and early spring when bison were under the greatest stress ended earlier here than it did elsewhere on the northern plains. Growth was sparse, but the tender new shoots were highly nutritious.

While a considerable portion of the grasses in the xeric mixed prairie in this region are cool-season(C_3) grasses like needle-and-thread (*Stipa comata*) that end their year's growth by early July, the dominant species is the drought resistant, warm-season(C_4) grass, blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*). Blue grama and buffalograss (*Buchloë dactyloides)* start their growth a month after the other grasses and in some areas may continue their growth until mid-August.[10] The productivity of the xeric mixed prairies is low and the nutritional quality of warm-season grasses is generally less than that of cool-season grasses. Nevertheless, the cool-season grasses of the northern mixed prairie begin growing early, and the warm-season grasses recovered well from the heavy grazing they experienced in late spring and summer.[11] Furthermore, blue grama grass, an exceptionally nutritious warm-season grass, is known to be a particular favourite of bison.[12]

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[9] For this reason, some argue that there should be no distinction between the regions. Making no distinction, however would obscure the different phenologies and productivities in the subregions.

[10] Clarke, Tisdale, and Skoglund, *The Effects of Climate and Grazing Practices*, 24; and Coupland, "A Reconsideration," 138. Dawson noted that the grasses in this region were dry in the mid-summer of 1882-4, George M. Dawson, "Report on the Region in the

The mesic subregion of the northern mixed prairie lies generally to the north of the xeric subregion. The two associations are classified as variations of one region because virtually all species found in the xeric prairie will also be found in the mesic prairie. Still, there are important differences. The dominant grasses in the mesic subregion are various heavier-yielding cool-season mid-grasses, including western porcupine grass (*Stipa curtiseta*), western wheatgrass (*Agropyron smithii*), needle-and-

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Vicinity of the Bow and Belly Rivers," Geological Survey of Canada *Report of Progress, 1882-84*, 9c.

[11] W.H. Black, A.L. Baker, V.I. Clark, O.R. Matthews, "Effect of Different Methods of Grazing on Native Vegetation and Gains of Steers in Northern Great Plains" (United States Department of Agriculture Technical Bulletin No. 547, 1937), 2.

[12] The fur traders as well as contemporary scholars perceived this. In 1790 Edward Umfreville noted that "in vallies [*sic*] and humid situations, the grass grows to a great height, which fattens our horses in a short time; but the buffalo usually makes choice of hilly, dry ground, to feed on, the blades of grass on which are small, short, and tender," Edward Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, (London, Charles Stalker, 1790), 153. In 1815 James Bird wrote that "part of the large plains are ... almost pure sand producing nothing but short scanty grass, (which is notwithstanding preferred by the Buffalo)"; HBCA (Hudson's Bay Company Archives) B.60/e/ Fort Edmonton District Report, 1815. Michael Wilson, "The Early Historic Fauna of Southern Alberta: Some Steps to Interpretation," in Ronald M Getty and Knut R. Fladmark, eds. *Historical Archaeology in Northwestern North America* (Calgary: University of Calgary Archaeology Association, 1973), 228.

thread, and the very early June grass (*Koeleria cristata*). Although growth of the cool-season grasses in the mesic prairie begins at least a week later in the spring than it does on the xeric prairie, greater moisture and lower temperatures allow plants to continue their growth and remain green longer in the summer. As a result, the productivity of the mesic grassland is substantially higher than that of the xeric subregion. Moreover, because the dominant species in the mesic prairie are early-growing cool-season grasses, its carrying capacity on average is already double that of the xeric prairie by the end of April.[13]

The fescue prairies were the most productive grasslands on the northwestern plains, and the ones upon which bison herds were most reliant during the winter. These grasslands, which are dominated by foothills rough fescue (*Festuca campestris*) or its smaller cousin, plains rough fescue (*F. hallii*), are supported by cooler summer temperatures (thus lower evaporation) and greater rainfall than the northern mixed prairie experience.[14] The fescue grasslands can be found in a nearly continuous arc in association with aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) groves in the parkland belt along the northern rim of the plains west of the forks of the Saskatchewan Rivers, and as a narrow band of submontane vegetation along the foothills of the Rocky Mountains along the western margins of the plains, and along and between the Big Belt, Little Belt, and Snowy Mountains of present-day Montana. Foothills rough fescue also penetrates the mountains in major valleys such as the Bow River Valley, the Crowsnest River Valley, the Waterton River Valley, and the Missouri River Valley where it occasionally occurs near subalpine meadows.[15] Finally, fescue grasslands are scattered throughout the northwestern plains on highland areas, benchlands, and occasionally on north-facing slopes in the mixed-grass prairie. The Milk River Ridge, Sweet Grass Hills, Cypress Hills, and Bearspaw Mountains are covered with rough fescue in almost pure stands that rival the northern parkland in their productivity.[16] Regarding the productivity of the fescue grasslands of the foothills, Duncan McNab McEachran, a visitor from eastern Canada in 1881 expounded on the quality of pasturage in the upper Bow River valley at the northern end of the Porcupine Hills:

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[13] R. Grace Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns on the Canadian Plains: An Ecological Analysis," *Plains Anthropologist* 25 (1980): 149, 151. The phenology of grasses in the mixed-grass prairie is given in S. Smoliak, W.D. Willms, and N. W. Holt, *Management of Prairie Rangeland* (Ottawa: Agriculture Canada Publication 1589/E, 1990).

[14] These two species were formerly known collectively as rough fescue (*Festuca scabrella*), Leon E. Pavlick and Jan Looman, "Taxonomy and Nomenclature of rough fescues, *Festuca altaica*, *F. campestris* (*F. scabrella* var. *major*), and *F. hallii*, in Canada and the adjacent part of the United States," *Canadian Journal of Botany* 62 (1984): 1739-49.

> There is an abundance of pine and cottonwood on Jumping Pound Creek and the hillsides, besides numerous thickets of alder and willow scattered here and there over the range, which afford excellent shelter for stock in winter. The grasses are

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[15] Brian O.K. Reeves, "Bison Killing in the Southwestern Alberta Rockies," in Leslie B. Davis and Michael Wilson, eds., *Bison Procurement and Utilization: A Symposium* Memoir 14 *Plains Anthropologist* 23 pt. 2 (1978): 66; Gene F. Payne, *Vegetative Rangeland Types in Montana* (Bozeman: Montana Agricultural Experimental Station, Montana State University, Bulletin 671, 1973), 6.

[16] Norman L. Anderson, "The Vegetation of Rangeland Sites Associated with Some Grasshopper Studies in Montana," (Bozeman: Montana State University, Bulletin 668, 1973), 5; Robert T. Coupland and T. Christopher Brayshaw, "The Fescue Grassland in Saskatchewan," *Ecology* 34 (1953): 390; J. Stan Rowe and Robert T. Coupland, "Vegetation of the Canadian Plains," *Prairie Forum* 9 (1984): 238; and F.B. Watts, "The Natural Vegetation of the Southern Great Plains of Canada" *Geographical Bulletin* 14 (1960): 36.

> most luxuriant, especially what is known as "bunch grass" [foothills rough fescue], and wild vetch or peavine [*Vicia americana* and *Lathyrus venosus*], and on the lower levels, in damper soil, the blue joint grass, which resembles the English rye grass, but grows stronger and higher [probably reed grasses, *Calamagrostis* spp.]. On some of the upland meadows wild Timothy [perhaps alpine timothy, *Phleum alpinum*] is also found. These grasses grow in many places from one to two feet high, and cover the ground like a thick mat. Nowhere else has the writer seen such abundance of feed for cattle.[17]

When in the Oldman River valley on the southern extremes of the Porcupine Hills, he wrote that

> here as further north, we found that as we neared the mountains, owing to the atmosphere being more moist and rains more frequent, the grasses became more luxuriant, and for about twenty-five miles from the base of the mountains, including the foothills, there is an inexhaustible growth of rich nutritious grass. It some places it is so thick and so long as to impede the progress of the horses.[18]

This visit occurred when buffalo no longer grazed these lands and before ranching grew to major importance, thus the grasses were probably more vigorous than they had been under bison grazing, but the descriptions indicate the productivity and nutritiousness of the foothills grasses. George M. Dawson of the Canadian Geological Survey, ~~echoed this~~ opinion. Dawson wrote of the Porcupine Hills that "within the Porcupines and their northward and southward extensions some of the best cattle ranching country of the entire North-west is situated."[19] Early observers wrote as enthusiastically of the outlying highlands. Captain John Palliser, when visiting the Cypress Hills during the dry late 1850s described the Cypress Hills as "a perfect oasis in the desert" marked by an

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[17] Duncan McNab McEachran, "Description of a Journey from Fort Benton to Bow River, NWT" GAI (Glenbow Alberta Archives), M736, p. 23.

[18] GAI M736, p 28.

[19] Dawson, "Report on the Region," 10-11c.

"abundance of water and pasture."[20] When John Macoun visited the Cypress Hills in the much wetter early 1880s he noted that "no better summer pasture is to be found in all the wide North-west than exists on these hills, as the grass is always green, water of the best quality is always abundant, and shelter from the autumnal and winter storms always at hand."[21] Captain W.J Twining, Chief Astronomer and surveyor for the United States during the boundary survey of the 1870s wrote of the Sweetgrass Hills region that "these Three Buttes are the centre of the feeding ground of the great northern herd of buffaloes. The herd, which ranges from the Missouri River north to the Saskatchewan made its appearance, going south, about the last of August. The number of animals is beyond all estimation."[22] George Dawson noted that the hills were marked by copious springs that supported wooded valleys and grassy foothills.[23] Even much smaller hills, like the Hand Hills, supported richer vegetation than the surrounding plains. According to John Palliser "the plain all around the base of the [Hand] hills is bare and arid, but the high level of the hill bears a fair and almost rich pasture, being 680 feet higher than the plain; it also contains lakes of pure fresh water, and gullies with a small growth of poplar."[24]

Like the foothills and uplands, the wide valley bottoms and depressions were important to bison during the winter, and like the fescue grasslands, the valleys and depressions supported a heavy growth of grass, particularly where influenced by the activities of beavers. Riparian environments usually supported a heavy growth of western wheatgrass, the most productive species on the northern mixed prairie.[25] As a result, the valley flats were about as productive as the fescue prairie.[26] Sedges (*Carex atherodes*), a favourite food of bison, also grew in moist depressions, and swamps.[27]

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[20] Irene M. Spry, ed., *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition, 1857-1860* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1968), 420, 19.

[21] Macoun quoted in R.G. McConnell, "Report on the Cypress Hills Wood Mountain and Adjacent Country," Geological Survey of Canada *Annual Report 1885*, 10c.

[22] Twining quoted in GAI M736, p. 32.

[23] Dawson, "Report on the Region," 17c.

[24] Spry, *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition*, 406. Also see 18-19.

The fescue grasslands, like other tall grasses along the margins of the plains, begin growing as much as a month later than the mixed prairies making them poor forage during the critical period in early spring when bison are weak. Rough fescue, like other grasses of the aspen parklands, responds poorly to heavy grazing during the growing season.[28] In the south and on the highlands like the Cypress Hills, however, the fescue grasslands are more species-rich than in the north, and the additional species found in the foothills region render that area more resistant to overgrazing than fescue grasslands to the north.[29] Equally important, however, is the fact that on the northwestern plains, especially in the foothills region, the fescue grasslands, xeric mixed prairie, and mesic mixed prairie are often very near one another physically, thus requiring bison herds to move only a short distance between them. The early growth of adjacent grasslands and the later growth of the fescue grassland induced major concentrations of buffalo to move onto the mesic mixed prairie in spring allowing the fescue to complete most of its growth cycle relatively undisturbed by grazing. The growth of fescue in June and July is robust and its productivity overall is markedly higher than other grasses on the northwestern plains, producing two or three times as much forage per acre as the xeric, and almost twice as much as the mesic mixed prairie.[30] Thus, the carrying capacity of land for large ungulates on the northwestern plains generally increases towards the north as the climate becomes cooler and wetter but, in contrast to the trend proposed by Bamforth, also increases towards the west and southwest as elevation increases. The various highlands of the northwestern plains, more common in the west than the east, also support more luxuriant growth of grasses because of the greater precipitation, and cooler temperatures (thus less evapotranspiration). Slope breaks in upland regions marked by freshwater springs increased the moisture available to flora and fauna. Finally, rough topography and the river valleys, relatively deeper and wider than valleys to the east provided areas of luxuriant grass growth, and areas of shelter from winter storms for both bison and humans.[31]

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[25] W.H. Black, *et al.*, "Effect of Different Methods of Grazing," 2; Payne, *Vegetative Rangeland Types in Montana*, 12.

[26] Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns," 149. Morgan also notes that beaver dams would have stabilized moisture conditions in many river valleys, enhancing the growing conditions beyond which might otherwise be expected. In the summer of 1805, Meriwether Lewis at the Great Falls of the Missouri noted that "the grass and weeds in this bottom are about 2 feet high; which is a much greater hight [*sic*] than we have seen them elsewhere this season. ... the grass in the plains is not more than 3 inches high." Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 14 July 1805 (4: 380).

[27] Dawson, "Report on the Region in," 9c; Bryan H.C. Gordon, *Of Men and Herds in Canadian Plains Prehistory* (Ottawa: National Museums of Man, Mercury Series, Archeological Survey of Canada, Paper No. 84, 1979), 18; and Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns," 154.

[28] Percy Russell Horton, "Some Effects of Defoliation on Plains Rough Fescue (*Festuca hallii* (Vasey) Piper) in Central Alberta," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1991, *passim* but see especially 278, 288-9.

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[29] Coupland and Brayshaw, "The Fescue Grassland," 399; Henry A. Wright and Arthur W. Bailey, *Fire Ecology: United States and Southern Canada* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1982), 107; Smoliak, Willms and Holt, *Management of Prairie Rangeland*, 17-19; Rowe and Coupland, "Vegetation of the Canadian Prairies," 238; W.D. Willms, S. Smoliak, and J.F. Dorman, "Effects of Stocking Rate on a Rough Fescue Grassland Vegetation," *Journal of Range Management* 38 (1985): 220-7. Important grasses that grow on the foothills and highlands but are not found in the northern parkland include the robust foothills rough fescue, Idaho (or bluebunch) fescue (*Festuca Idahoensis*), and Parry oat grass (*Danthonia Parryi*).

[30] S.E. Clarke, et. al. *An Ecological and Grazing Capacity Study*, 24-8. Also see Gordon, *Of Men and Herds*, 20 and Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns," 148.

Because of the topography, various early growing and late maturing grass species were found in close proximity. Bison that depended on the abundant grasses of the fescue prairies all winter often had to move only a short distance to graze on the early spring growth of June grass or wheatgrass. Bison on the flatter eastern plains did not have this advantage. Other characteristics of the western grasses also sustained buffalo. It is a general rule that taller grasses consist of a higher proportion of cell wall, and thus are less nutritious than shorter grasses[32] but this would probably not have been a major limiting factor for bison which digest poor quality forage well. It might better explain why other ungulates like pronghorn antelopes (*Antilocapra americana*), which required higher quality forage, were most common on the western plains. More important was the relative tendency of various grasses to cure in the summer or fall. Curing is a process in which grasses retain high levels of digestible carbohydrates and a portion of their crude protein after their growth period ends. Although the grasses of the tallgrass prairie grow abundantly, few of their species cure on the stem. Their nutrition drops rapidly after the first fall frosts bring the growing season to an end. In contrast, many grasses of the northern mixed grass, and fescue prairies cure well and remain erect, retaining much more of their carbohydrates and protein than eastern grasses even until the grasses resume growing in the spring.[33] Unique characteristics of fescue grasses make them particularly good dormant season forage. Fescue grasses retain high crude protein levels exceptionally well, contain a very low percentage of lignin (a structural substance related to cellulose), and have a very low degree of cross-linking in the lignin-cellulose complex that forms the cell walls.[34] Early ranchers had no scientific explanations but they were quick to notice the superior quality of fescue grasses during the dormant season. McEachran noted that

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[31] McNab McEachran noted that "the rolling nature of the land and the abundance of never-failing springs and streams issuing from the hill-sides in all directions, make this a natural pasturage." GAI M739, p. 31.

[32] Wilson in Getty and Fladmark, eds., *Historical Archaeology in Northwestern North America*, 228.

> We were informed, and have no reason to doubt it, that these grasses do not wither and die as they do in a more humid climate, but, owing no doubt, to the purity and dryness of the air, they cure on their roots and make excellent hay. They thus preserve all their nutritious qualities, and make excellent feed for winter, a fact which is proved by the fat condition of all stock wintered in that country.[35]

Thus, although the northwestern grasslands may not have been as productive as those of the northeastern plains, the grasses were more nutritious during the critical period of the year when the quality of forage would be at its nadir.

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[33] Smoliak, Willms, and Holt, *Management of Prairie Rangeland*, 13-4; Black *et al.*, "Effect of Different Methods of Grazing," 2; and Clarke *et al.*, *An Ecological and Grazing Capacity Study*, 24; Wilson in Getty and Fladmark, *Historical Archaeology in Northwestern North America*, 228.

[34] Horton, "Some Effects of Defoliation on Plains Rough Fescue," 279, 95.

[35] GAI M736, p. 23-4. Also see GAI M736, p. 32.

Not only did the northwestern plains, especially the fescue prairie regions, provide more abundant forage than most neighbouring areas on the Great Plains, and not only did the quality of its forage in winter and early spring exceed that of other neighbouring areas, but average climatic conditions on the northwestern plains also were more likely to sustain buffalo populations during the winters.

Climate

The Rocky Mountains generally act as a barrier to the flow of mild Pacific air, and as a result the climate of the entire northern plains is continental, with long cold winters and short warm summers. The orographic effects of the mountains produce a rain shadow effect, with precipitation, both in the form of rain and snow, being lighter on the northwestern plains than on the northeastern plains. Nevertheless, Pacific air moderates temperatures in the west more than it does in the east. More important, although the Rocky Mountains block the free flow of moist Pacific air, they also engender foehn winds known in the northwest as chinooks. These warm dry winds have the greatest effect on regions closest to the mountains, and, because grasslands adjoin the Rocky Mountains from the Bow River south into the Missouri basin, this area is most affected by the winds. In many of these areas chinook winds are so strong and constant that they have affected the shape of landforms in the region.[36] When mild Pacific air passes over the Rocky

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[36] Chester B. Beaty has shown that the alignment of the coulees of southwestern Alberta is related to the direction of the prevailing chinooks, *The Landscapes of Southern Alberta: A Regional Geomorphology* (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Printing Services, 1975).

Mountains, especially during the winter, the heat released into the air by condensing water vapour and droplets produces warmer air temperatures east of the Rocky Mountains than west. The dry, warm chinook winds from the southwest keep the southwestern part of the region (the chinook belt) generally snow free and quite warm for much of the winter (Figure 1.4). In fact, on average the present-day city of Lethbridge, Alberta has temperatures above 5° C (40° F) on 35 days during the coldest three months of the year (December, January, and February) while Winnipeg, at nearly the same latitude averages fewer than 2 such days.[37] On his first visit with the Peigan in the winter of 1787-8 David Thompson recorded: "Our guide also told us that as we approached these [Rocky] mountains of snow we should find the weather become milder; This we could not believe, but it was so and the month of November was full as mild as the month of October at the trading house we left to the eastward. For the cold of these countries decreases as much by going westward as by going south." A passage in the journals of Alexander Henry the Younger illustrates the effects of a typical chinook. On the morning of 19 January 1811 at Rocky Mountain House, the temperature was 17° F, the wind was out of the northwest and there were two feet of snow on the ground. Then Henry heard a noise

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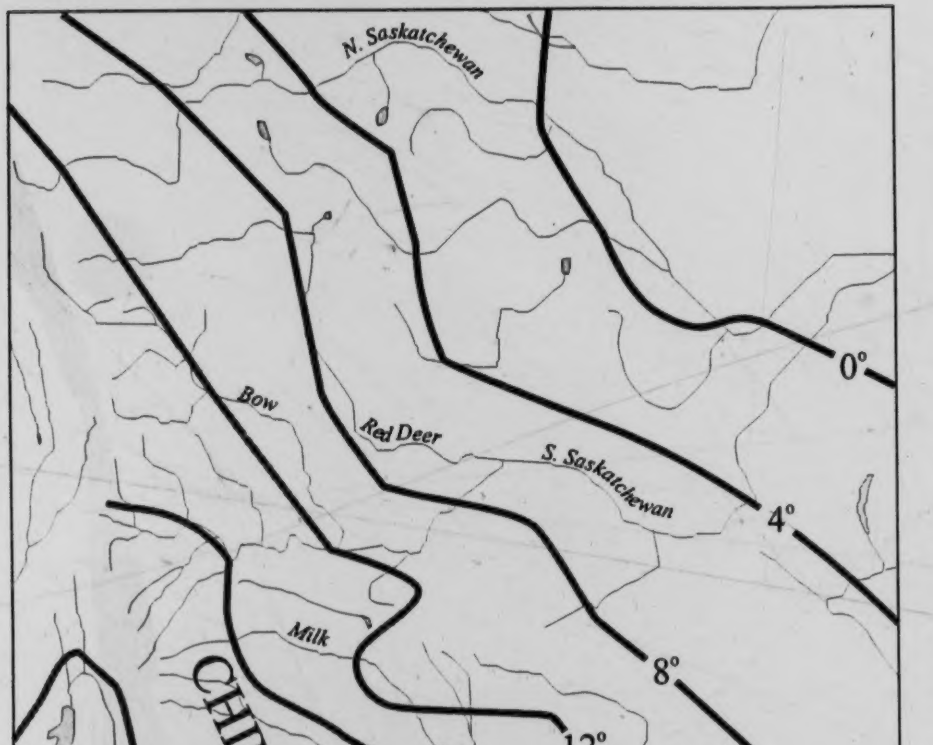
[37] See Figure 1.4 or the map in Richmond W. Longely, *"The Frequency of Chinooks in Alberta,"* *The Albertan Geographer* 3 (1966-7).

Figure 1.4
Average January Temperatures on the Northwestern Plains (°F)


N. Saskatchewan
0°
Bow
Red Deer
S. Saskatchewan
4°
Milk
8°
CHINOOK BELT
12°
Missouri
16°
20°
12°
16°
Yellowstone
North

Adapted from Richard W. Longley, *The Climate of the Prairie Provinces* (Toronto: Climatological Studies No. 13, Environment Canada, 1972), and Robert L. Taylor, Milton J. Edie, and Charles R. Gritzner, *Montana in Maps* (Bozeman: Montana State University, Big Sky Books, 1974).

> towards the Southward as if a strong gale of wind was passing ... At 12 OClock we began to observe the tops of Pines to bend to the wind, and in a short time the gale reached us from the S.W. Upon meeting with the face it was warm and gentle, but very soon increased to a [?] gale ... at 1 Oclock the Thermometer stood at 56 above Zero, having rose 16 degrees in the course of 3/4 of an hour. ... the wind increased in a most violent manner which continued during the night ... At sunrise the Thermometer stood at [?] above Zero, and to our great surprise we found the snow all melted away, and nothing but a few ponds of water remaining. Not one speck was to be seen in the plains, nor anywhere were [*sic*] the wind could reach it.[38]

The result of chinooks is that in most years the forage is easily accessible to grazing animals most of the year.[39] The drying winds help to cure the grasses, ensuring that the nutritive value of plants in this region remains higher than in moister regions of the prairie.[40] The survival of contemporary feral horse herds over the long term in both the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and on the Suffield Military Experimental Range in southeastern Alberta (north of Medicine Hat, Alberta) is attributable to these factors.[41] Bison, which are better adapted to the harsh climate and limited forage of the region than horses, were better able to maintain their numbers than horse herds were.

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[38] Barry Gough, ed. *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger: 1799-1814* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1992), 20 January 1811. The effects of other chinooks are also evident from Henry's notes. For example, Henry noted that southwest winds boosted the temperature at Rocky Mountain House from -36° F at mid-day 22 November 1811 to +36° F by mid-day the next day, Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger,* 583.

[39] Richmond W. Longley, *The Climate of the Prairie Provinces*, (Toronto: Climatological Studies No. 13, Environment Canada, 1972), Figs. 4 & 5, (p. 12).

[40] S.E. Clarke, Tisdale, and Skoglund, *The Effects of Climate and Grazing Practices*, 24.

[41] In fact, the feral horses on the military base survived into the 1990s when they were finally rounded up and sold by the military. Herds in the foothills are under pressure but still survive.

North of the Bow River, a wedge of forest separates the grasslands from the mountains. Therefore, the chinook winds affect the northern prairie less than the southern grasslands. In the North Saskatchewan River basin, snow cover, although not usually deep, is more or less constant from November to March. Above-freezing temperatures are considerably less frequent than they are in the south. Still, compared with the Red River region of the eastern prairies, which is farther south and lower in elevation, the North Saskatchewan basin has higher average winter temperatures and no greater average depth of snow cover.[42] The parkland region, characterized by plains rough fescue and by many wet meadows of luxuriant sedges, is more extensive in the extreme northwestern plains than it is anywhere else. Thus, even there bison were likely to find plentiful forage both during the winter.

Humans As Agents in a Dynamic Environment

Biomes are not static ecological communities but dynamic systems. Certain forces that increased the productivity of the grasses of the northwestern plains in the past have now been suppressed. Among the most important of these factors were fire and the bison. Aridity is the primary ecological force in the development of the grassland biome, but precipitation alone does not account for the extent of the grasslands of North America during the bison era. The prairie-forest ecotone (and the tall grass prairie) was the product of climate, fire, and herbivore interaction. Fire formerly had an important effect on ecosystems throughout North America.[43] On the grasslands, fire was important in preventing trees from invading areas along the margins of grasslands that had sufficient precipitation to support forests. While travelling down river from Rocky Mountain House to Edmonton near Lake Wabumun in 1811, Alexander Henry the Younger saw "the first spot of open Meadow Country I have seen along the Saskatchewoine River on my way down." Henry attributed the existence of open country there (which today is dominated by aspen and spruce forests), to "the frequent fires that have ravaged the Country and destroyed the Wood, as is evident from a few straggling stumps that are yet to be seen," further explaining that "upon a soil covered with Aspen and Birch the Fire in a few years converts into beautiful open Meadows Ground, but where the Pine and Willow grow it require a much longer space of time to alter the face of the Country."[44] Passing farther down the river, near the site of Edmonton House, Henry noted that

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[42] See Longley, *Climate of the Prairie Provinces*, Figs. 4, 5, and 32 (pp. 12 & 45).

> the face of the Country now assumes a different appearance from what we have yet passed on our way down. Barren knowls covered with Strong Grass, intermixed with a few stunted Aspen frequently present themselves to our view, and the Country in general appears more open, with a range of high Hills, on both

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[43] The most thorough study of the history of fire in North America is Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982). Other useful discussions of the influence of fire include T.T. Kozlowski, ed., *Fire and Ecosystems* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Wright and Bailey, *Fire Ecology*. Studies more specific to the grasslands include C.O. Sauer "Grassland Climax, Fire, and Man," *Journal of Range Management* 3 (1950): 16-21; and Omer C. Stewart, "Why Were the Prairies Treeless," *Southwestern Lore* 20 (1955): 59-64. More recent studies include Daniel J. Axelrod "Rise of the Grassland Biome, Central North America," *Botanical Review* 51 (1985): 163-201; and R.C. Anderson "The Historic Role of Fire in the North American Grassland," Scott L. Collins and Linda L. Wallace, eds., *Fire in North American Tallgrass Prairies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 8-18.

[44] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 562-3.

> sides running on a parallel with the River at every bend forming a flat bottom thickly covered with Wood, in which we frequently saw Red Deer, but did not stop to fire ... It is fully evident that not many years ago, that all this Country was thickly covered with Wood and scarcely a spot of Prairie could be found but the ravages of the frequent fires have nearly destroyed the woods upon the high grounds, which are now very fast assuming the appearance of an open Meadow Country, and I make no doubt in the course of a few years the Country from Upper White Mud, downwards, will be one continual Plain.[45]

Henry may have been right. It is likely that fires became more common in the early nineteenth century. Still, the prairie-forest ecotone was always a dynamic environment. Forests repeatedly invaded moist areas along the margins of the plains even as they were continually destroyed by natural and anthropogenic fires. Later observers understood this fact. According to Henry Youle Hind, a visitor to the northern plains in 1857-8, "if a portion of the prairie escapes fire for two or three years the result is seen in the growth of willows and aspens, first in patches, then in large areas, which in a short time become united and cover the country, thus retarding evaporation and permitting the accumulation of vegetable matter in the soil. A fire comes, destroys the young forest growth and establishes a prairie once more."[46] John Palliser, who travelled the plains in the same years, noted the same thing.[47]

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[45] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger,* 564. It is evident that frequent fires also had a dramatic influence on the forests that bordered the plains, Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger,* 3 Feb 1811 (referring to the Rocky Mountain House region), 28 Aug 1808 (referring to the area around Cumberland House), 352 (referring to the forests north of the Saskatchewan forks region); Lawrence J. Burpee, ed., "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country: The Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-1755," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada,* Series 3, vol. 1 (1907), Section 2, 327 (referring to the Carrot River area).

[46] Hind quoted in George W. Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting among the Northern Plains Indians* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Mercury Series Paper No. 37, 1975), 27.

The fescue grasslands of the northern plains occur in what is known as the parkland belt — an ecotone between the grasslands and the boreal forest. On its inner margins, the parkland belt consists of a small groves of aspen and willow scattered about the grassland; on its outer margins the small meadows are dispersed in near continuous forests. Modern agricultural settlement eliminated the important ecological factors that kept the parkland more open than it has been since. In 1885 George M. Dawson observed of the foothills of the Oldman River basin that "recurring fires have much extended the open country."[48] He had earlier found that the lower slopes of the Porcupine Hills were open grassland, the higher slopes were marked by scattered trees, and only the highest western points were forested.[49] Several studies that compare late nineteenth and early twentieth-century land surveys and present-day conditions, suggest that tree cover has increased substantially in the parkland belt and foothills.[50] For example, brush has invaded significant areas of the Porcupine Hills since Dawson's observations of 1883.[51] The fact that areas of today's parkland forests are characterized by black chernozemic soils more typical of fescue grasslands also suggests that the trees have been invading areas that have been grasslands for many years.[52] Clearly then, the margins of the northern plains at the end of the bison era were more open than contemporary conditions might suggest. The implications for the study of human history are significant because forests tended to invade the most productive fescue grasslands first, reducing the forage available to grazers.[53] Fire then, significantly enhanced the status of the northwestern plains as an oasis for bison.

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[47] Spry, *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition*, 9, 331, 391, 538.

[48] George M. Dawson, "Preliminary Report on the Physical and Geological Features of that Portion of the Rocky Mountains, Between Latitudes 49° and 51° 30'," Geological Survey of Canada *Annual Report 1885*, 18b.

[49] Dawson, "Report on the Region," 10c.

[50] David V. Hildebrand and Geoffrey A.J. Scott, "Relationships Between Moisture Deficiency and Amount of Tree Cover on the Pre-Agricultural Canadian Prairies," *Prairie Forum* 12 (1987): 203-16; O.W. Archibold and M.R. Wilson, "The Natural Vegetation of Saskatchewan Prior to Agricultural Settlement," *Canadian Journal of Botany* 58 (1980): 2031-42; Arthur W. Bailey and Robert A. Wroe, "Aspen Invasion in a Portion of the Alberta Parklands," *Journal of Range Management* 27 (1974): 263-6; and Wright and Bailey, *Fire Ecology*, 115-6.

Natural and anthropogenic fires played a large role in maintaining grasslands in areas where the potential dominants were aspen or even spruce forests. Lightning is well documented to have started prairie fires both in the bison era and the era of Euroamerican settlement.[54] Such fires killed most evergreen trees regardless of the time of year they occurred, and suppressed the growth of aspen and willows significantly. It should be noted, however, that aspens are very fire hardy. Although fires can damage or kill aboveground growth of aspen, aspen and parkland shrubs like Saskatoon (Service) berries (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) will respond by suckering profusely. Under these conditions, the habits of bison and other ungulates would have been significant. Cattle and bison are primarily grazers, but they are known to browse, trample, and wallow on young shoots of aspen.[55] In fact, the tendency of bison to congregate in thickets of aspen in the winter (when aspen shoots would be brittle) to escape cold weather, and in summer to rub and scratch themselves, could make the effects of trampling and wallowing significant.[56] Early observers certainly believed so. Shortly after arriving on the northeastern plains for the first time in August of 1800 Alexander Henry the Younger noted that

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[51] A. Johnston and S. Smoliak, "Reclaiming Brushland in Southwestern Alberta," *Journal of Range Management* 21 (1968): 404-6. According to Reeves aspen has also invaded river valleys in the mountains; Reeves in Davis and Wilson, eds., *Bison Procurement and Utilization*, 66.

[52] Rowe and Coupland, "Vegetation of the Canadian Plains," 242.

[53] One study has found that forage yield under a closed canopy of brush in the Porcupine Hills of southwestern Alberta was only a third of what it was on adjacent fescue prairie, Johnston and Smoliak, "Reclaiming Brushland." Another study estimates that afforestation can reduce the productivity of grasses by 90 percent or more, R.D. Fitzgerald and A.W. Bailey, "Control of Aspen Regrowth by Grazing with Cattle," *Journal of Range Management* 37 (1984): 156-8. If this is indicative of the effects of the invasion of aspen forests since the suppression of fire, historians would do well to take note. Also see Smoliak, Willms, and Holt, *Management of Prairie Rangeland*, 17.

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[54] On 18 December 1792 when in the Highwood River valley, Peter Fidler noted that lightning frequently set the prairie on fire, HBCA E.3/2; S. Raby, "Prairie Fires in Saskatchewan Grassland," *Saskatchewan History* 19 (1966): 81-99; J.S. Rowe, "Lightning Fires in Saskatchewan Grassland," *The Canadian Field Naturalist* 83 (1969): 317-24; and J.G. Nelson and R.E. England, "Some Comments on the Causes and Effects of Fire in the Northern Grasslands area of Canada and the Nearby United States, ca. 1750-1900," *Canadian Geographer* 15 (1971): 295.

[55] For the habit of cattle and bison to browse young aspen see Wright and Bailey, *Fire Ecology*, 121; and Celina Campbell, Ian D. Campbell, Charles B. Blyth, and John H. McAndrews, "Bison Extirpation May Have Caused Aspen Expansion in Western Canada," *Ecography* (17 (1994): 361. For a discussion of wallowing see Arthur, *Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Bison Hunting*, 14-5.

[56] Arthur, *Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Bison Hunting*, 16; Fitzgerald and Bailey, "Control of Aspen Regrowth," 156-8; R.D. Fitzgerald, R.J. Hudson, and A.W. Bailey, "Grazing Preferences of Cattle in Regenerating Aspen Forest," *Journal of Range Management* 39 (1986): 13-18.

> the ravages of the Buffalos at this place is certainly astonishing, .. The willows are intirely [*sic*] trampled and torn to atoms, even the bark of the smaller trees are in many places totally rub'd off by the Buffalo rubbing or scratching themselves against them. The Grass upon the first bank of the river is entirely worn away. The numerous paths (some of which are a foot deep in the hard turf) which comes out of the Plains to the bank of the River, and the vast quantity of dung which lays in every direction, gives this place the appearance of a civilized Country where Cattle have been kept for many years.[57]

Other ungulates common on the plains or parkland like mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), moose (*Alces alces*), which prefer to browse rather than graze, and elk (*Cervus elaphus*) which will browse, would have browsed more mature trees, further suppressing their growth.[58] Although the role of the bison in suppressing tree growth had been suggested as early as 1961, a recent pollen study that dates the invasion of grassland by aspen to the extirpation of the bison rather than the suppression of fire, suggests that the role of the bison may have been underestimated.[59] There is ample evidence then, that cycles of drought, combined with the effects of fire and bison acted to suppress tree growth on the margins of the plains during the bison era. Historical evidence, and the evidence that aspen forests invaded the grasslands quickly, suggests that the parkland ecotone was significantly more open in the past, and that areas that are "naturally" forested today, may have been much more open in the past. Copses of young aspens, even thickets of evergreens, existed as they do today in the parkland, but their growth and expansion was continually suppressed by fire and bison.

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[57] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 32 (also see p 47). Matthew Cocking, noted that "all over the Country where Buffalo resort are many hollow places in the Earth, made (the Natives tell me) by the Male Buffalo in the Covering Season," HBCA B.239/a/69, 9 October 1772. For a discussion see Ralph D. Bird, *Ecology of the Aspen Parkland of Western Canada* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, Publication No. 1066, 1961), 28.

[58] Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns," 150; J. G. Nelson, *The Last Refuge* (Montreal: Harvest House), 140. Moose would also have frequented the parkland. The effects of browsing should not be overestimated, however, since most parkland shrubs and trees tolerate heavy browsing.

[59] Campbell, *et al.*, "Bison Extirpation," 360-2. George Arthur suggested the importance of the bison in this regard in *An Introduction of the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 13-16. Also see Nelson *The Last Refuge*, 133. The role of the bison in maintaining short grass prairie has also been discussed, see Floyd Larson, "The Role of Bison in Maintaining the Short Grass Plains," *Ecology* 21 (2) (1940): 113-21.

While fires suppress woody growth, they encourage growth of grasses. Many scholars formerly assumed that fire was a detrimental force that robbed the soil of fertility and hindered all plant growth.[60] Scholars now recognize the salutary effects of fire on the growth and regeneration of grasslands. Many studies show that all grasslands that burn in fall, winter, or spring will tend to begin their growth in spring a week or two earlier than prairie that has not been burned.[61] Studies of the effects of fires on grassland productivity generally are not conclusive for short grasses, but clearly show that taller grasses respond to fire and to grazing by increasing their growth. Whether or not the overall productivity of a particular grassland increases, ample evidence exists to prove that ungulates gain weight more quickly on recently burned grasses than on long-unburned grasses. Interestingly, there is evidence that even mixed-grass prairie in southeastern Alberta that was burned as late as July and August attracted pronghorn antelopes as early as late fall and winter. Apparently, the summer fires encouraged the grasslands to produce high-quality forage at a time of the year that forage quality was usually declining. The antelope in the study also grazed the highly digestible and nutritious plains prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia poyacantha*) that had been singed. Cattle are also attracted to cactus when their spines have been singed off.[62] Thus, it is apparent that the elimination of forage by fire was only a very short-term drawback for foragers that was more than compensated in the longer-term. Productivity is increased following fire in most grasslands, and both mammals and birds respond well following fires.[63]

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[60] R. Daubenmire, "Ecology of Grassland Fires," *Advances in Ecological Research* 5 (1968): 211; Raby, "Prairie Fires," 81.

[61] Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting,* 30; Daubenmire, "Ecology of Grassland Fires," 242.

Scholars were slow to acknowledge the importance of the deliberate use of fire by indigenous peoples. According to Stephen Pyne, however, "the evidence for aboriginal burning in nearly every landscape of North America is so conclusive, and the consequences of fire suppression so visible, that it seems fantastic that a debate about whether Indians used broadcast fire or not should ever have taken place."[64] Pyne has shown that it was formerly well-known that Indians commonly used fire, but that when it became popular belief that fire was harmful to the environment and that good management meant the suppression of fire, the assumption that Natives were noble savages "in tune" with nature led to the denial that Indians had ever deliberately burned the grasslands.[65] Even as ecologists and naturalists increasingly came to see that fire has long been a natural disturbance that is not detrimental to the environment, scholars have also been more willing to discuss the aboriginal use of fire. Today, scholars understand that the environment in the Americas from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic Ocean and on other continents, was being "managed" by the indigenous peoples for their own purposes before contact with European peoples.[66] Natives would have had good reason to burn their environments. Anthropologist Henry T. Lewis has noted that most plant and animal species used by humans are most abundant in early development ecosystems, not mature or climax systems.[67] Fires, in short, were deliberately used by Native peoples in efforts to make their lives more secure.

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[62] Rick F. Courtney, "Pronghorn Use of Recently Burned Mixed Prairie in Alberta," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 53 (1989): 302-5.

[63] Richard J. Vogl, "Effects of Fire in Grasslands," in T.T. Kozlowski, ed., *Fire and Ecosystems*.

[64] Pyne, *Fire in America*, 81.

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[65] Pyne, *Fire in America*, 81. Other discussions of this same argument are contained in Henry T. Lewis, "Maskuta: The Ecology of Indian Fires in Northern Alberta," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropolgy* 7 (1977): 18, and in B.L. Turner II and Karl W. Butzer, "The Columbian Encounter and Land-Use Change," *Environment* 34 (8)(October 1992): 18. In this discussion the use of fire as an ecological management tool is emphasized. It should be acknowledged, however, that fire was used for several purposes (although all, of course, has ecological consequences). Other aboriginal uses of fire will be discussed in later chapters.

[66] See Turner and Butzer, "The Columbian Encounter"; Nancy M. Williams and Eugene S. Hunn, eds., *Resource Managers: North American and Australian Hunter-Gatherers* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982); Emily W.B. Russell, "Indian-Set Fires in the Forests of the Northeastern United States," *Ecology* 64 (1983): 78-88; Pyne, *Fire in America*, 45-51, 71-99. For studies of the indigenous use of fire in the regions adjoining the northwestern plains see, Stephen W. Barrett and Stephen F. Arno, "Indian Fires As an Ecological Influence in the Northern Rockies," *Journal of Forestry*, 80 (1982): 647-51; Lewis, "Maskuta"; Henry T. Lewis, *A Time for Burning: Traditional Uses of Fire in the Western Canadian Boreal Forest* (Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1982).

[67] Henry T. Lewis, "Maskuta," 18. In making the same point, E.V. Komarek has labelled these ecosystems "fire environments," E.V. Komarek, quoted in Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire in America*, 43.

Although there are no systematic historical studies on the use of fire by the indigenous peoples of the northern plains several scholars have presented evidence that Natives deliberately set fire to the prairies.[68] Fires encouraged improved forage for large game like bison and elk, but also created ideal conditions for fire-hardy Saskatoon berries and prairie turnips. George Arthur has presented abundant evidence that the Natives of the northern plains understood that they could use fire to make their lives more secure. He notes that Lewis and Clark witnessed the Hidatsa burning the prairie near their villages in early March "for an early crop of grass, as an inducement for the buffalow to feed on."[69] Fires could be used strategically at different times of the year to influence the movement of bison herds. For example, the northern mixed prairie could be burned in the autumn (or even winter in snowless winters) to induce the bison to move to their wintering areas and to encourage the early greening of those grasses. The fescue grasslands could be burned in the spring to encourage the movement of bison onto the plains and to encourage the early greening of those areas. A group might burn any area in any season as they moved away from it in anticipation that game would be more plentiful upon their return. On the other hand, fescue grasses could be burned in the fall to prevent the bison from wintering where they otherwise might. Fur traders frequently mentioned that Natives burned the prairie near fur trade posts to keep the bison out of the reach of the traders during the winter.[70] This would make the traders dependent during the winter upon their Native suppliers. The same strategy could be used in attempts to prevent the movement of herds towards rival Native groups.

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[68] The aboriginal use of fire on the northern plains is discussed in George Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 22-7; in Henry T. Lewis, "Fire Technology and Resource Management in Aboriginal North America and Australia," in Williams and Hunn, eds., *Resource Managers*, 54-5; Nelson and England, "Some Comments on the Causes and Effects of Fire," 297-8; and Mavis A. Loscheider, "Use of Fire in Interethnic and Intraethnic Relations on the Northern Plains," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 7(4)(1977): 82-96. The Provincial Archives of Alberta has an archival photograph (P. 138) from 1903 showing two Blackfoot men reenacting the starting of a prairie fire. The photograph suggests that the act of starting a fire was accompanied by ritual and ceremony. The photograph is reproduced in Lewis, "Fire Technology," 48; Raby, "Prairie Fires." Also see HBCA E 3/2 January 1793.

[69] Quoted in Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 25. Also see pp. 26-7.

Evidently then, certain topographical, vegetational, and climatic characteristics of the northwestern plains allowed them to support the most abundant bison herds on the Great Plains. To the Natives of the region, this abundance was important in itself. The environment also rendered these bison particularly easy to harvest. The rolling terrain and the frequent rough breaks greatly facilitated the use of communal bison drives. Bison jumps are a distinctive feature of the northwestern plains, rare elsewhere on the Great Plains, but common in the upper Bow, Oldman, and Upper Missouri River basins. In rolling terrain insufficiently broken to allow for jumps, Natives constructed bison pounds. Bison jumps and pounds are significant because for many centuries Native hunters relied on them most commonly from late fall to early spring, the critical period of the year. The rugged terrain also made it easier to stalk bison.[71] Even the almost incessant winds worked to the advantage of hunters. Bison are keen of smell, and can be difficult to approach when the weather is calm or the winds very light. Finally, the bluffs of trees in valleys and other sheltered locations, and the nearby forests, provided an important supply of shelter and wood for human communities. In 1802 Charles Le Raye recorded that "they [the Crow] represent the country as fertile beyond description and as inhabited by numerous bands of Indians. The buffalo, elk, cabree [pronghorn], deer, black and white bears are found there in vast multitudes."[72]

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[70] Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 133; Loscheider, "Use of Fire in Interethnic and Intraethnic Relations."

[71] J. Rod Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems on the Alberta Plains," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 15 (1991): 62.

The fact that the northwestern plains were a bison oasis had important implications. Most significantly, the region attracted Native societies from all directions. Throughout the bison era, the region was one of eager immigrants but reluctant emigrants. Wherever they came from and whatever subsistence strategies they may have been accustomed to, all migrant communities to the region quickly came to rely heavily upon the bison. Dependence upon the bison meant hunting communities moved continually through extensive territories, because the size and concentration of bison herds varied seasonally. Inevitably, human communities in constant pursuit of the bison interacted frequently. For this reason it is important to understand the annual cycle of the bison and hunters on the northwestern plains.

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[72] Charles Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 4 (1908): 177.

Chapter Two
The Annual Cycle of Bison and Hunters

> A few of [the Crow] assembled and draughted on a dressed skin, I believe a very good map of their Country, and the[y] showed me the place where at different seasons they were to be found.
>
> They told me that in winter they were always to be found at a Park [bison pound or jump] by the foot of the Mountain a few miles from this or thereabouts. In the spring & Fall they are upon this [Yellowstone] River and in the summer upon the Tongue and Horses River.
>
> François-Antoine Larocque, 1805.[1]

If *nomadism* is meant to imply wandering, very few human societies must ever have been nomadic. *Nomadism* instead suggests communities moving with the cycles of resource availability. Particular bands resorted seasonally to familiar locales where they had learned their needs could be met. The movements of people were not aimless, but were regular and premeditated. Under typical conditions, Native bands on the northwestern plains repeatedly visited familiar sites. Under adverse conditions they understood their environment well enough to make adjustments to their seasonal rounds. Observers have long agreed that the annual cycles of the hunting bands of the northwestern plains were closely tied to the annual cycle of the bison.[2] Fur traders remarked on this fact. Alexander Henry the Younger wrote of the Peigan that "it is the motion of the Buffalo which regulates their course throughout the year over this vast extent of meadow Country as they must always be near them to obtain a supply of provisions for their Families."[3] The annual cycle of human hunters influenced patterns of human interaction. Clearly then, an understanding of past human hunters requires an awareness of bison habits.

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[1] W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders Among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 182 and 192.

[2] Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 6. The same idea is expressed in Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State* Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 94.

Scholars though, have not agreed on past bison behaviour. Because there are no more large free-roaming herds of bison, observers cannot simply describe normal bison behaviour. Instead, efforts to reconstruct past bison behaviour have produced longstanding and lively debates. Until 1951, many believed that bison herds migrated *en masse* to the south for the winter. Apparently then, Native groups who were simply unable to migrate such distances had to adapt to extended periods of the year when bison were absent. In 1951, Frank Gilbert Roe's monumental study of the bison put the theory of grand migration to rest. In its place, Roe defended a view that bison movements were absolutely capricious and unpredictable. He argued that bison "wanderings were utterly erratic and unpredictable and might occur regardless of time, place, or season, with any number, in any direction, in any manner, under any conditions, and for any reason — which is to say, for no reason at all."[4] Elsewhere, Roe described the bison as "one of the most incalculable species that ever trod the earth."[5] His image of the bison tended to explain the view then prevalent of Native life on the Great Plains. Roe made no systematic attempt to tie human movements to those of the bison, but based on his belief that "hunting peoples are basically what the characteristic habits of the predominating game species of their own tribal or hunting habitat force them to become," he argued that the unpredictability of the bison explained the endless wandering and "the frequent historical occurrence of privation and even of positive famine in the lives of the Plains tribes."[6]

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[3] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger,* 535-6.

[4] Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 674.

[5] Frank Gilbert Roe, *The Indian and the Horse* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 197.

In 1962, Symmes C. Oliver published the first systematic attempt to explain Plains Native history in the context of the annual cycle of the bison.[7] Oliver assumed that the remarkable similarities among Plains Native groups were linked to geographical and ecological aspects of the region. He attached particular importance to the bison. Oliver's work set the stage for the scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s. Basing their studies on documentary records, archaeologists George Arthur and R. Grace Morgan, and historical geographers D. W. Moodie and Arthur J. Ray argued that bison in the past migrated according to a seasonal pattern.[8] Others have since questioned these scholars' methods and conclusions.

In 1987, Douglas Bamforth warned of the inherently problematic nature of historical documents for the study of bison habits. The Governor and Committee of the

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[6] Roe, *The Indian and the Horse*, 197-199, quote from 197.

[7] Symmes C. Oliver, *Ecology and Cultural Continuity as Contributing Factors in the Social Organization of the Plains Indian* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), 1-90.

[8] Arthur *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*; D.W. Moodie and Arthur J. Ray, "Buffalo Migrations on the Canadian Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* 21 (1976): 45-52; Morgan "Bison Movement Patterns"; Jeffery R. Hanson, "Bison Ecology in the Northern Plains and a Reconstruction of Bison Patterns for the North Dakota Region," *Plains Anthropologist* 29 (1984): 93-113.

Hudson's Bay Company in London did not seek information about bison movements on the northern plains and so information in traders' journals is fragmentary. Other observers, like Captain John Palliser and Henry Youle Hind, both of whom visited the region in the late 1850s, described the bison at a time when, it is assumed, the herds were under considerable stress. Thus, Bamforth argued, scholars need to supplement historical research with studies of other free-roaming large ungulates, particularly in Africa.[9] Bamforth based his theories of bison behaviour on studies of ungulates in Africa and on studies of grassland vegetation in Africa and North America. Where possible, he used historical documents to confirm what his ecological analysis predicted regarding bison behaviour. The result has been more of an elaboration on the best studies based on historical documents than a revision of these studies.[10]

Bamforth was correct to alert scholars to the difficulty of using historical sources to reconstruct bison movements. His warning about the documentary record, however, is especially applicable to documents generated by short-term visitors who observed bison herds when they were already clearly under stress. Still, much of the scholarly literature of the 1970s and 1980s was based on extensive research in early fur trade documents. Fur traders in the northern plains were heavily dependent on the bison as a food source. Because the plains were the pantry of the northern fur trade, fur traders recorded a wealth of information regarding bison movements and behaviour. Scholars should supplement fur trade journals with archaeological evidence and knowledge of grassland ecology. Still, the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg remain an excellent source for studying the annual cycle of the bison, and for the environmental history of the northern plains in general. Unfortunately, those who have questioned the seasonal migration thesis have relied on a relatively small amount of published primary literature, rather than the vast collection of unpublished evidence contained in fur trade journals.

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[9] Douglas B. Bamforth, "Historical Documents and Bison Ecology on the Great Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* 32 (1987): 1-16.

[10] Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization.*

Several archaeologists in the 1980s and 1990s, citing published historical sources, ecological knowledge, and archaeological evidence, questioned the seasonal migration thesis directly. In 1984, anthropologist Jeffrey Hanson relied on modern bison behavior, historical documents, and grassland ecology to argue that the seasonal migration thesis was untenable. Hanson argued that bison were present in various grassland habitats all year and migrated erratically only short distances in response to unpredictable natural and anthropogenic stimuli.[11] In 1996, after a review of published primary literature, Mary E. Malainey and Barbara L. Sherriff concluded that the fur trade records contradicted the seasonal migration thesis. They used archaeological evidence and published primary sources to defend their theory that bison tended to winter on the open grasslands rather than in the parkland.[12] At present then, the scholarly consensus that appeared to be developing behind the seasonal migration thesis, is shattered.

Despite the skeptics, the seasonal migration thesis needs only minor modification.

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[11] Hanson, "Bison Ecology in the Northern Plains," 93-113.

[12] Mary E. Malainey and Barbara L. Sherriff, "Adjusting our Perceptions: Historical and Archaeologist Evidence of Winter on the Plains of Western Canada," *Plains Anthropologist* (1996): 333-57.

Fur traders' records, other historical documents, archaeological evidence, and scientific research show that bison concentrations varied seasonally according to regular patterns under normal conditions and in predictable ways under anomalous conditions. The regularity and predictability of bison movements greatly influenced human hunting societies and patterns of human interaction. Knowledgeable and experienced human hunters moved deliberately from place to place; they did not wander aimlessly looking for the bison or for their human neighbours. Under anomalous conditions, movements of bison herds could depart significantly from the idealized pattern, but then hunting bands tapped the knowledge of their most experienced and skilled members to predict where the herds might be found, or turned to alternative food sources.[13] Those who depended on the bison learned their habits thoroughly. Hind, even in the mid-nineteenth century, wrote that "the ranges of the buffalo in the north-western prairies are still maintained with great exactness, and old hunters, if the plains have not been burnt, can generally tell the direction in which herds will be found at certain seasons of the year. If the plains have been extensively burnt in the autumn, the search for the main herds during the following spring must depend on the course the fires have taken."[14]

The northwestern plains produced awe-inspiring landscapes. Herbivores included elk, deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, and ground squirrel, but the plains bison, as the dominant generalist foragers, were at the core of an elaborate ecosystem. Many predators and scavengers depended largely on the bison. Wolves were ubiquitous.[15] Packs of them patrolled the margins of the herds looking for wounded or sick animals, or for leftovers from a human hunt. Crows, ravens, and magpies hovered constantly in their search for abandoned carcasses.[16] They were joined on the ground by a collection of coyotes and foxes. Grizzly and black bears ate only a modest amount of bison meat; they subsisted mostly on roots and berries. Still, they were eager, especially in spring, to make a meal of a dead bison, and a single grizzly, never averse to fresh bison meat, could take a full-grown bison in ambush.[17] Even humans were wise to give the plains grizzly a wide berth, unless well armed.[18] The bison also fed hordes of biting insects. Compared with other predators, human hunters were few but wise. The lives of human societies were intertwined with those of the bison, but the annual cycles of human communities also influenced the patterns of contact among themselves.

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[13] A detailed defence of this variable concentration thesis, which is based on the seasonal migration thesis requires a lengthy digression. This seasonal migration thesis is well defended in the works of Morgan and Moodie and Ray. Nevertheless, given the doubt cast on the season migration thesis, it is necessary to defend the theory that bison concentrations varied seasonally according to a regular pattern. So as not to interrupt the flow of the present study, this defence is contained in Appendix I of the present study.

[14] Henry Y. Hind as quoted in Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 24.

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[15] Henday referred to "Wolves without number," near the buffalo herds, Lawrence J. Burpee, ed., "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country: The Journal of Anthony Henday, 1754-1755," *Royal Society of Canada Proceedings and Transactions*. Series 3, vol. 1 (1907), Section 2, 333. Also see Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 336; and W. K. Lamb, ed., *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 260-1.

[16] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 33.

[17] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 259.

[18] The stories of bear attacks on humans are frequent enough to make it clear that confrontations with bears carried considerable risk, HBCA B.239/a/40, 17 September 1754. A graphic description of a fatal bear attack is contained in J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916), 340-1. Edward Umfreville noted of grizzly bears that "the numbers of maimed Indians, to be seen in this country, exhibit a melancholy proof of their power over the human species"; Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 168.

Spring

Winter releases its grip on the northern plains only grudgingly. Heavy snowfalls and hard frosts are common, particularly on the high plains and foothills, even in April and May. Nevertheless, during most years the first of the native cool-season grasses of the northern mixed prairie began growing in late March and early April. In the sheltered parklands, foothills, uplands, and valleys, snow persisted and the fescue grasses remained dormant for several more weeks. Not surprisingly, the tender protein-rich cool-season grasses of the mesic mixed prairie coaxed the bulk of the bison herds out of their sheltered winter range just as millions of biting insects emerged to drive the herds into the open. George Bird Grinnell noted that "as spring opened, the buffalo would move down to the more flat prairie country away from the pis'kuns [buffalo jumps]."[19] Many of the cows led calves that had been born between early March and late June — bison can reproduce at a rate that approaches 18 percent per year — that replaced the many bison lost to predators and accidents during the previous year.[20] After subsisting on dried grasses since early autumn, the bison eagerly grazed the short swards of new growth.[21] Immature cows and the bulls gained weight quickly, nursing cows more slowly.[22]

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[19] George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 234.

[20] Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 476.

[21] R.J. Hudson and S. Frank, "Foraging Ecology of Bison in Aspen Boreal Habitats," *Journal of Range Management* 40 (1987): 71-5.

The northwestern plains are dry, but May and June are the wettest months. In those months cool easterly winds often collide with warmer air or meet highlands to the south and west producing rains in most years. When fed by these rains, the northern mixed prairie responded well to heavy bison grazing, producing new growth continuously as weather allowed. Conversely, the fescue grasses, which responded poorly to spring and early summer grazing, were relatively undisturbed during their period of most robust growth between early May and early June.[23]

While the bison population peaked in spring, herds were also widely spread and highly mobile at that time of year as they grazed on the scanty new vegetation. With surface water at its peak availability, bison could use their entire range very effectively. Because the bison herds were widely dispersed, it was not easy for humans to rely on bison in spring. When hunters had a store of dried food, they could have remained in their sheltered winter camps, protected from the common April and May snow storms, where they could prepare clothing for the summer months. They could also turn to alternate species like elk, deer, and bighorn sheep, or supplement their diet with the eggs of wild fowl.[24] On the northwestern plains, or to the westward, Natives could gather or trade for bitterroot, prairie turnips, and camass bulbs in spring and early summer before their leaves withered and died, concealing their substantial roots.[25] Dried, these products could either be consumed immediately or kept for later use. Finally, needy bands could turn to their kin to assist them.

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[22] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 3 July 1810.

[23] Horton, "Some Effects of Defoliation on Plains Rough Fescue," 84, 277. Gordon, *Of Men and Herds*, 35, 37.

[24] George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 240-1, 207.

During the spring, most human communities, like the plains bison, gravitated towards the mesic mixed prairie and dispersed into small mobile groups (Figure 2.1).[26] Even after guns became available hunters generally ran bison on horseback, killing them with bow and arrow. Bison could be taken individually by bow and arrow or even with a gun without stampeding a herd, but this had to be done very carefully, especially with a gun. The hunter targeted the leading cow first, and sought to kill each animal instantly so as minimize the risk of stampeding the herd. Thus, bison could be taken by gun, but for various reasons Natives rarely did so.[27]

Exceptionally hot and dry weather in spring and early summer reduced significantly the carrying capacity of the prairies, especially the summer pasture. The aridity made the grasses less productive and the scarcity of water left part of the range inaccessible to herds. Two or more years of dry weather not only reduced productivity, but began eliminating the more productive cool-season grasses from the drier portions of

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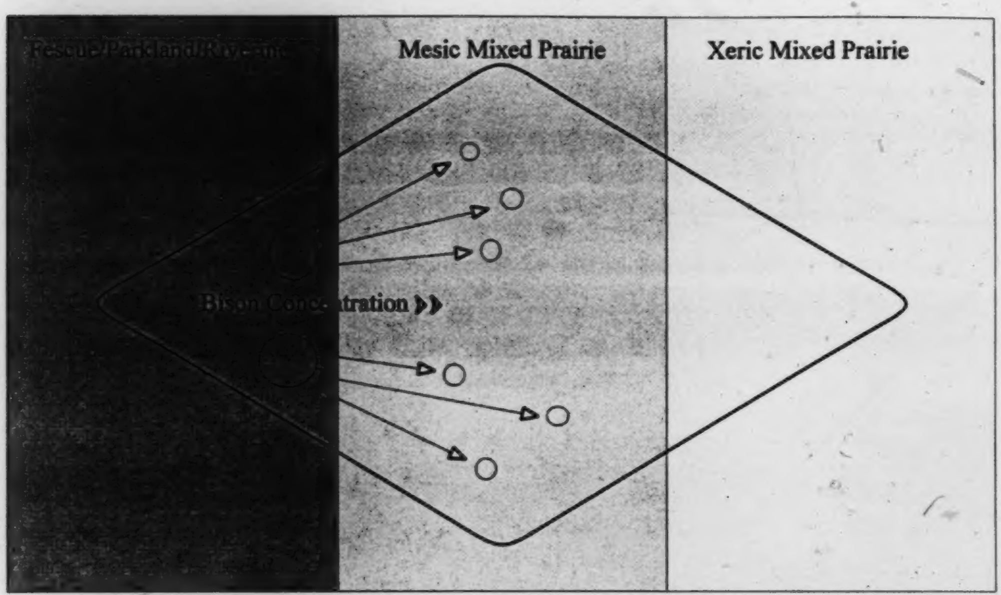
[25] Ewers, *The Blackfeet, Raiders*, 86; Alice B. Kehoe, "How the Ancient Peigans Lived," *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 14 (1993): 87-105.

[26] Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems," 60-62.

[27] Alexander Henry the Younger mentioned shooting many cow buffalo with a gun. Each time they would move off only a short distance. None of the buffalo were killed, only wounded. They shot until their powder horns were empty. Gough, *Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 46. For a discussion see Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 75-78.

Figure 2.1

Bison-Hunter Concentrations on the Northwestern Plains in Spring



Beginning in late March or early April bison were most concentrated on the mesic mixed prairie where cool season grasses were growing vigorously. Human hunting bands dispersed to follow and hunt the small mobile herds. Bison were taken by decoying, stalking, and surrounding them. On the diagram the diamond represents the relative numbers of bison on the different areas of the prairie while the circles represent the relative size and movements of human bands.

the xeric mixed prairie. Then, the altered constitution of the grasslands could affect grassland productivity, and bison populations, over a longer term. Unusually cool, wet springs, or periods, had the opposite effect.

In sum, bison and human communities were small and dispersed in spring. Hunters were more oriented towards securing subsistence and planning and preparing for the endeavours and expeditions of the summer. Bands therefore, were likely to interact with neighbouring bands with whom they had cooperative, reciprocal, and trading relationships but they rarely launched war expeditions at this time.

Summer

As the weather grew warmer and drier in late spring and early summer, growth of the cool-season grasses slowed. By July, the warmest month on the northwestern plains, these grasses had flowered, their growth had nearly stopped, and their palatability had decreased. From May to July however, the warm-season grasses like blue grama, dominant in the xeric mixed prairie, grew vigorously. Although these grasses were not very productive, they were protein-rich and appealing to bison.[28] As the rut approached in early July, the bulls were sleek, and this was the only time of the year that human hunters valued the meat of bulls and cows equally.[29]

With the animals coming into rut in midsummer (the rut peaking in early August on the northwestern plains), the mature bulls, which formed separate herds most of the year, mingled with the cow herds, establishing relatively few but enormous herds. Wherever they went, the herds left their mark. They stirred up dust and destroyed the vegetation with their wallowing, and rubbing. Their dung and urine fouled the water and the air. The peculiar grunting of the excited males resounded over the landscape, night and day, like the roar of a distant rapids.[30] The agitated bulls, warm weather, scanty forage, and biting insects kept the herds constantly on the move.[31]

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[28] Blue Grama is a favourite of buffalo, Wilson, "The Early Historic Fauna of Southern Alberta," 228. Also see Gordon, *Of Men and Herds*, 17.

[29] Matthew Cocking reported on 9 October 1772 that the Natives often were forced to rely on bulls in autumn but that they disliked this situation, their "being poor all the Year except in the first part of the Summer," HBCA B.239/a/69. While visiting the Mandan/Hidatsa villages in the 1790s Pierre-Antoine Tabeau noted that "the buffalo (bull) is never fat except for two months [before the rut] in the year while the cow, on the contrary, is almost always so," Anne Heloise Abel, ed. *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 71. Clark Wissler noted that the Blackfoot considered bison bulls to be in their best condition in June, Clark Wissler, "The Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians," American Museum of Natural History *Anthropological Papers* 5 (1)(1910): 41. Meriwether Lewis noted on 11 July 1806, as the rut was beginning, that bison bulls were generally fatter than the cows, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 8: 106. Also see Ewers, *The Horse*, 152, and Ewers, *The Blackfeet, Raiders*, 76.

By late summer, especially in dry years, many water sources in the xeric prairie disappeared. As the weather cooled noticeably in August, the growth of warm-season grasses of the xeric mixed prairie slowed and the forage became scanty. The bison once again gravitated towards the mesic mixed prairie and riverine habitats where water sources and forage were more plentiful. Even in August grazing, summer fires, and falling temperatures could stimulate new growth of cool-season grasses.[32]

Pedestrian and equestrian human settlement patterns during the summer may have differed considerably (Figure 2.2). During the equestrian era, June or early July witnessed the largest human gatherings of the year. Family and friends strengthened and renewed their relationships during the annual Sun Dance, held at this time of the year. Summer was also a time for war and raiding expeditions. The gathering bison herds, the prolific saskatoon berries, and the long daylight hours encouraged and supported large

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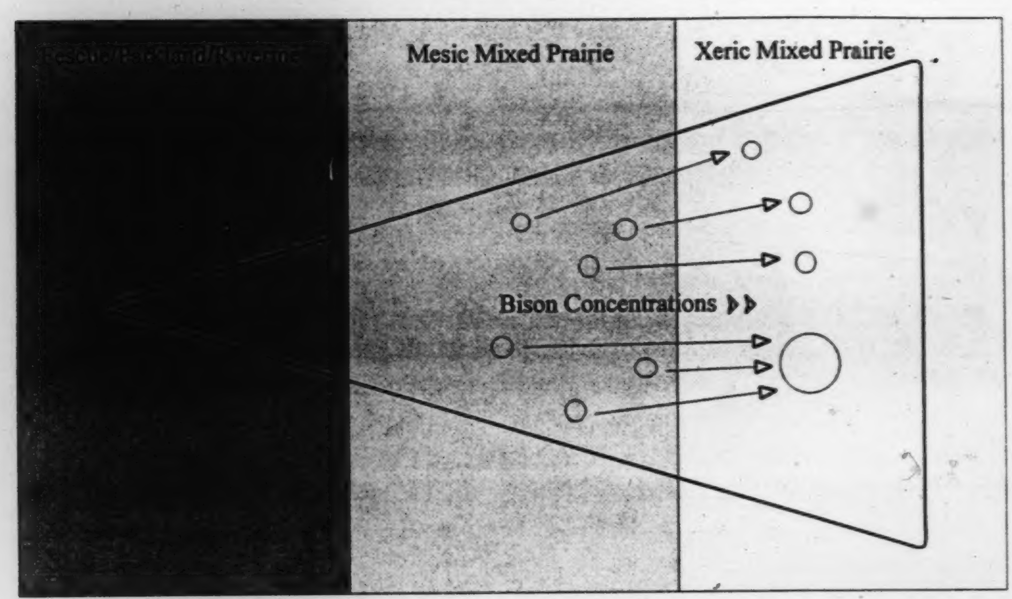
[30] This is how Captain John Palliser described it in 1858, Spry, *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition*, 258. Also see Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 284; and Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 11 July 1806 (8: 104).

[31] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 15 July 1810; Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns on the Canadian Plains," 152.

[32] Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns on the Canadian Plains," 153.

Figure 2.2
Bison-Hunter Concentrations on the Northwestern Plains in Summer


Fescue/Parkland/Riverine
Mesic Mixed Prairie
Xeric Mixed Prairie
Bison Concentrations ▶▶

By late June and early July bison were concentrated on the xeric prairie where the palatable warm season grasses were growing vigorously. Pedestrian hunters may have been forced to stay in small mobile bands to follow the herds although the formation of combined cow and bull herds in August may have allowed for larger encampments. In the equestrian era, summer encampments were typically large.

encampments.[33] Women gathered berries to be consumed immediately or dried and stored in bags for later use.[34] Men could travel considerable distances on horseback to find bison herds and transport meat. Although bison might occasionally be driven into pounds or over jumps during the summer, they were most characteristically taken by running them on horseback with bow and arrow.[35] Anthony Henday, in 1754, noted that the mounted hunters of the northwestern plains were "so expert that with one, or two, arrows they will drop a Buffalo."[36] The tendency of bison to herd together as they stampeded facilitated the hunt. Bison had greater endurance than even the fleetest horses though, so the chase lasted only so long as the horses could keep up. Because unwise hunting methods could drive herds out of range of a camp, the large summer gatherings were governed by strong regulations regarding bison hunting and by police societies that enforced these prescriptions. Leaders coordinated and planned hunts to make them as effective as possible.

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[33] Anthony Henday repeatedly mentioned how plentiful berries were on his trip to the northwestern plains in 1754. He also mentioned that the Natives ate them fresh and dried them for future use, even suggesting that berries constituted the chief part of their diet in late summer, Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," *passim*, but see especially 331.

[34] Ewers, *The Blackfeet, Raiders*, 86.

Once the bison were rutting, it probably became more difficult to hunt them. Herds may have been larger, but they were less predictable and more mobile. Bulls, though less wary of danger, could be very aggressive and dangerous themselves. Alexander Henry the Younger noted that bulls were "very fierce and not in the least timorous, as they will often turn upon a man and pursue him for some distance."[37] It is understandable, then, that the largest human gatherings occurred early rather than late in the summer.

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[35] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 372; Eleanor Verbicky-Todd, *Communal Buffalo Hunting among the Plains Indians: An Ethnographic and Historical Review* (Edmonton: Archaeological Survey of Alberta Occasional Papers No. 24 [1984]), 5. George Frison suggests that the presence of bulls in the herds in summer time may have been disruptive enough to make it difficult to pound buffalo at that time, George C. Frison, "The Role of Buffalo Procurement in Post-Altithermal Populations on the Northwestern Plains," *University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology Anthropological Papers* 46 (1972): 11-20.

[36] Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 340.

[37] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger 1799-1814*, 284. Also see Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 332.

There is some question as to whether Native groups gathered in such large summer encampments during the pedestrian era. Archaeologists have found small summer camps, but have not found evidence to show that large encampments were typical of pre-equestrian plains societies.[38] We know that absence of evidence does not constitute evidence of absence. Archaeological evidence may be lacking because it is more difficult to guess where a large summer site might have been located than where a large winter site might have been, and because these summer sites are more likely to have been disturbed by agricultural activities in the twentieth century. Still, it is also possible that large summer encampments and Sun Dances were a post-horse phenomenon, or became much more common during the equestrian era.

In equestrian days hunters could range considerable distances to hunt the bison and to transport butchered meat, but in pedestrian days, their possibilities were much more limited. Before the arrival of the horse, Native summer hunts were based on surrounding herds or by stalking bison singly. Hunters could lure animals by mimicking bison calves or approach them by camouflaging themselves as solitary wolves. They could take advantage of the bison's tendency to lie and rest during the warmest part of the day. Because bison have relatively poor eyesight, but a keen sense of smell, hunters could decoy themselves fairly easily. Still, they had to approach their quarry from downwind. Surrounding or stalking herds may have been no easier in the summer than it was in the spring despite the existence of large herds. The level treeless summer range of the bison afforded little cover in which to hide.[39] During the rut, bulls were inattentive to hunters but were very dangerous when attacked and wounded. The horse was particularly important to summer subsistence. The archaeological evidence of small summer encampments and the lack of evidence of large summer gatherings, combined with our knowledge that the horse was particularly suited to summer hunts, makes it plausible that summer encampments were typically much smaller in the pedestrian era than they were in the equestrian era.

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[38] Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems on the Alberta Plains," 64.

Autumn

Autumn is usually dry on the northwestern plains. Depending on forage and moisture conditions, herds could stay on the grasslands into the fall. Skittish of ambushes by grizzlies, wolves, or humans, plains bison appear to have avoided the wooded country when possible. Nevertheless, as the highly mobile herds wandered about they gravitated towards the fescue grasslands of the foothills and parkland and in the deep river valleys. After their late start, the highly productive fescue grasslands grew vigorously during the late spring and remained green into September and October.[40] Not only were they the most productive grasses on the northwestern plains; by September they were also the most nutritious on the northern plains.[41] Cold weather and winter storms also induced bison herds to seek the thermal cover available in these habitats. Warm snow-free weather can persist, however, to the end of October in the north, and even longer in the south. While warm weather allowed the grasses to cure, it also encouraged bison herds to remain dispersed on the open plains. Then human hunters might set fire to the open grasslands to force herds to move towards their normal winter pastures.

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[39] Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems on the Alberta Plains," 66.

[40] Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns on the Canadian Plains," 153.

[41] Horton, "Some Effects of Defoliation on Plains Rough Fescue," 89.

According to George Grinnell, "in the last of the summer and early autumn, they [the Blackfoot] always had runners out, looking for the buffalo, to find where they were, and which way they were moving. In the early autumn, all the pis'kuns were repaired and strengthened, so as to be in good order for winter."[42] John Palliser noted that the Blackfoot turned at the end of summer from the open plains towards the foothills where they expected the bison to seek shelter in the winter and where the Natives themselves sought shelter and fuel."(Figure 2.3)[43] In the broad valleys and in the hills, the Natives gathered saskatoon berries, although the berries were now dry on the stem, they harvested choke cherries, which ripened just as their leaves cloaked the valley sides in brilliant red, or gathered lodgepoles from nearby evergreen forests and prepared winter clothing. Hunting parties could resort to the mountains to hunt bighorn sheep, whose horns were used for bowls and ladles.[44]

Hunters attempted communal bison hunts whenever circumstances permitted. Thus, if herds arrived at the rough country early, they were taken at jump sites in autumn. Bands that wintered in the foothills would relied on jumps. In the parkland and plains,

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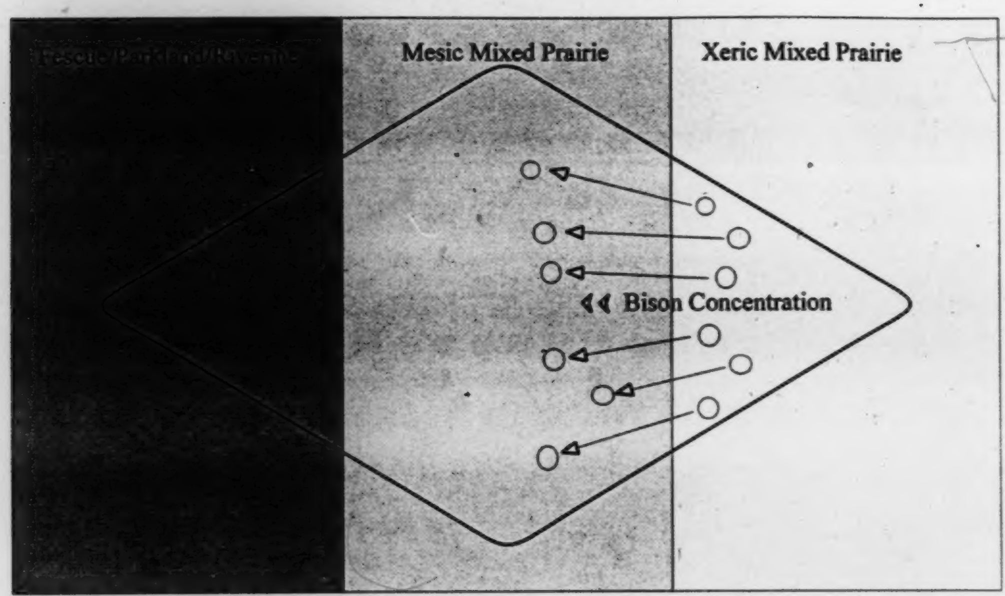
[42] Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 234.

[43] Spry, *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition*, 266.

[44] Joseph Burr Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* (Toronto: Champlain Society, [Vol. 12], 1916), 338; Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 166.

Figure 2.3
Bison-Hunter Concentrations on the Northwestern Plains in Autumn



In August and September major concentrations of bison were on the mesic prairie where surface water supplies were still adequate and where cool season grasses were in their second growth cycle. At the end of September the combined cow and bull herds were separating again as the rut ended. Human hunting bands moved with the bison concentrations.

the topography rarely allowed for jumps. There the hunters often depended on bison pounds. William Pink provided what is probably the earliest description of a bison pound, but William Cocking's journal provides a detailed early description of a Blackfoot pound:

> It is a Circle fenced round with trees laid one upon another at the foot of a Hill, seven feet high and a hundred yards in circumference, supported by letting trees into the Ground on each side and binding them with Leather thongs at top; the Entrance on the Hill side, where the Beasts can easily go over but when in cannot return, from this Entrance sticks are set up in form of a fence making an angle on each side extending from the Pound, beyond these to about one one-half mile distant Buffalo Dung or old roots are laid in heaps in the same direction as the fence, these are to frighten the Beasts from deviating on either side. This Pound the Yachithinue Indians are supposed to have made last spring who it seems had

great success abundance of Buffalo skulls & Bones laying in it.[45]

Communal bison hunts of this type, however, occurred mostly in winter and early spring.[46] Hunters typically took bison in autumn by surrounding and stalking them in pre-horse days, and by running them in the equestrian era. Mature bison bulls lost weight during the rut but the cows and immature bison reached their prime in early autumn.[47] With the leanest period of the year coming, hunters sought to accumulate stores of preserved meat. In the warm dry days of autumn, butchered meat could easily be dried into a jerky or even processed into pemmican.[48] Autumn, like spring, then, was a time for preparation for the coming season. Neighbours and friends likely visited and traded, but this was rarely the season to launch long-distance trading or warring expeditions.

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[45] B.239/a/69, 23 October 1772. William Pink's description is quoted in Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 102. For another early description of a bison pound see James Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776 by Alexander Henry Fur Trader* (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1901), 299-301.

[46] Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems on the Alberta Plains," 64. For some years it was assumed that bison pounding was a warm-season hunting strategy not used in winter. One of the primary bits of evidence to support this view was a passage dated 6 December 1772 in the published version of Matthew Cocking's journal: "No success in pounding; the Strangers [Blackfoot] say the season is past," Lawrence J. Burpee, "Journal of Matthew Cocking from York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, 1772-1773" *Royal Society of Canada Proceedings and Transactions*. Series 3, vol. 2 (1908), 111. In the original and more complete version of Cocking's journal, however, Cocking only suggests that the herds have moved away from the pound: "they say most of the Beasts are gone a bad prospect of hungry times," HBCA B.239/a/69, 6 December 1772.

[47] Clark Wissler, "The Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians," American Museum of Natural History *Anthropological Papers* Vol. 5, pt. 1, 1910: 41 says that the Blackfoot considered cows to be in their best condition when the leaves began to fall (quoted in Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 99). Also see Claude E. Schaeffer, "The Bison Drive of the Blackfeet Indians," *Montana Archaeological Society Memoir* no. 1, 1962: 29 as quoted in Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 100. Ewers said the cows were in prime condition "when 'spear grass' (probably *Stipa comata*, needle-and-thread) was spread out." Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfeet Indian Culture*, 152.

Winter

The crude protein content of grasses on the northern plains declined throughout the fall and winter, but the grasses of the northwestern plains retained their nutrition better than did the grasses farther east, and were more abundant, particularly in the fescue belt, than the grasses farther south. Bison, whose digestive systems are well adapted to digest low quality feed, eat more to grass to compensate for the poor forage.[49] Unlike cattle, however, bison do not significantly increase their metabolism to generate more heat in cold weather. Instead, they reduce their activity conserving energy and forage.[50] Indeed, bison exhibit various characteristics that enable them to survive on the North American plains better than cattle, and these advantages are particularly evident during the critical winter months. Bison are better able to digest low quality forage than cattle are, and they develop a much deeper and denser winter coat than cattle do.[51]

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[48] In May 1755 some Blood offered Anthony Henday "Some fatt & berries mixt together, and the belly of a buffaloe which is very fine Eating," HBCA B.239/a/40, 16 May 1755.

[49] R.J. Hudson and S. Frank, "Foraging Ecology of Bison in Aspen Boreal Habitats," *Journal of Range Management* 40 (1987): 71-5. Also see Gordon, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 40.

[50] R.J. Christopherson and R.J. Hudson, "Effects of Temperature and Wind on Cattle and Bison," *Annual Feeders' Day Report* (28 June 1978): 40-1; R.J. Christopherson, R.J. Hudson, and R.J. Richmond, "Feed Intake, Metabolism and Thermal Insulation of Bison, Yak, Scottish Highland and Hereford Calves during Winter," *Annual Feeders' Day Report* (8 June 1976): 51-2; Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, 41-2.

In the chinook belt, where there is little winter snow accumulation, bison could graze even the remaining short, well-cured grasses of the northern mixed prairie, resorting to shelter only when the weather was cold and windy. The scanty snow, often blown into drifts, provided moisture that allowed the bison to graze areas inaccessible in the dry autumn period. These dispersed herds were probably of little use to human hunters, and the tendency of humans to burn the grasslands in the fall and even winter may have been part of an attempt to force animals that might have stayed on the open plains, to move to their normal winter range. For this reason, warm snow-free winters often produced great hardship for human hunters. The herds would be so scattered that large bands could not depend on communal hunts, and small bands could not kill not enough animals to sustain their members.[52] Even if chinook conditions tempted hunters to wander onto the plains they must always have feared the arrival of one of the sudden and unpredictable storms that could blow in from the north.

In most winters the open plains were inhospitable to the bison. The bison, now in separate cow and bull herds, were most numerous in those areas where forage was plentiful and shelter nearby. This forage and shelter could be found in the fescue crescent, composed of that broad parkland belt near the North Saskatchewan River and the rough terrain of the foothills, and in the uplands dotted throughout the region, and in the valleys of the major rivers. There were some very large herds of bison in winter.[53] This was true throughout the northern plains. During the January of his first winter on the northern plains Alexander Henry the Younger noted that "I supposed I had seen incredible numbers of Buffalo in the fall coming up, but they were nothing in comparison to what I now beheld. The ground was perfectly covered in every direction of the compass, as far as the Eye could penetrate in the wood, and see over the plains, and every one in motion."[54] Primarily, however, bison herds were many but small herds.

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[51] Glenn E. Plumb and Jerrold L. Dodd, "Foraging Ecology of Bison and Cattle on a Mixed-Prairie: Implications of Natural Area Management," *Ecological Applications* 3 (1993): 639; R.J. Richmond, R.J. Hudson, and R.J. Christopherson, "Comparison of Forage Intake and Digestibility of Bison, Yak, and Cattle," *Annual Feeders' Day Report* (8 June 1976): 49-50; D.G. Peden, G.M. Van Dyne, R.W. Rice, and R.M. Hansen, "The Trophic Ecology of *Bison Bison* L. on Shortgrass Plains," *Journal of Applied Ecology* 11 (1974): 489-97.

[52] Moodie and Ray, "Buffalo Migrations on the Canadian Plains," 49.

According to Grinnell, "as winter drew near, the bison would again move up close to the mountains, and the Indians, as food began to become scarce, would follow them toward the pis'kuns."[55] Winter camps, then, were located in the sheltered foothills and parklands (Figure 2.4). Hunters had to consider the availability of fuel for winter fires, forage for horses (in the equestrian era), shelter from incessant winds and winter storms, and proximity to bison jumps or pounds when they chose the sites for their winter camps. The fact that most of the bison herds gathered in a relatively small area allowed humans to gather together as well. Large winter encampments were

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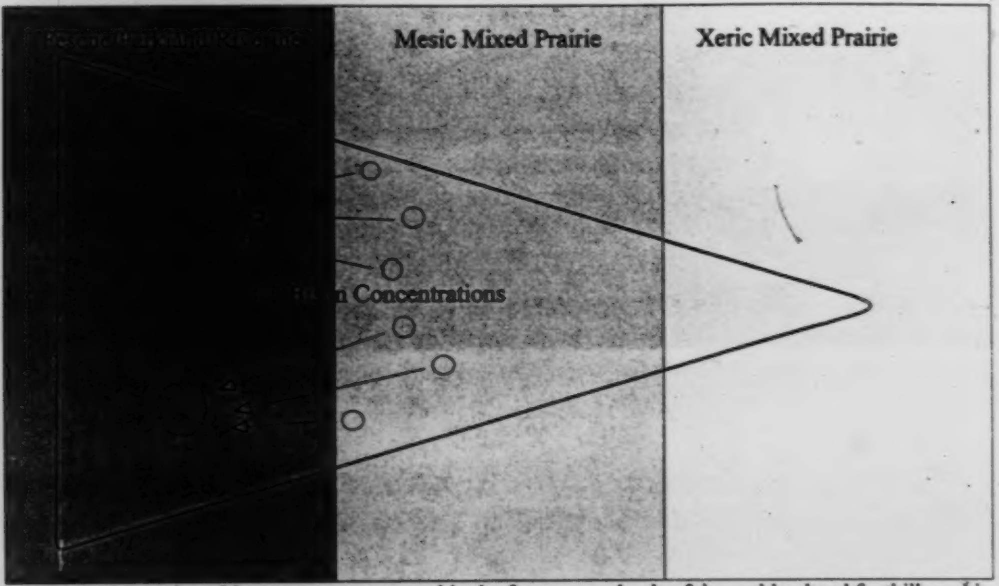
[53] Arthur, *An Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Communal Bison Hunting*, passim.

[54] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 107 (14 January 1801).

[55] Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 234.

Figure 2.4
Bison-Hunter Concentrations on the Northwestern Plains in Winter



During the long winter bison were concentrated in the fescue grasslands of the parkland and foothills and in the sheltered riverine habitats. Pedestrian hunters often preceded the bison into these regions. Pedestrian hunters could form large aggregations because the small and sedentary but concentrated separate cow and bull herds were vulnerable to Native attempts to trap them in pounds and jumps.

probably limited to the chinook belt.[56] Smaller encampments, spaced a few miles apart (in keeping with the limited fuel and forage available in most locations) in the river valleys formed a variation on the large single encampment.[57] Since forage for horse herds was an important consideration not important in pre-equestrian years, it may be that the advent of the horse encouraged this later settlement pattern.

The archaeological, historical, and ethnographic evidence shows that, during both the pedestrian and equestrian eras, Natives employed bison jumps and pounds more in the winter and early spring than at any other time of the year.[58] Commenting on an earlier belief that the Blackfoot used bison jumps only in the autumn and stored dried meat for the winter, George Arthur has written that "the supposition that the northern Plains tribes laid up enough dried provisions in autumn to supply themselves throughout the often severe winters while they remained inert in their camps relies essentially on the basic premise that the drives ended in December. Otherwise, why lay up great stores of meat during autumn?"[59] In fact, Natives did hunt bison throughout the year, but they also accumulated stores of dried meat, especially in the early fall. They did so for sound reasons.

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[56] It is in that region where archaeological evidence of large winter encampments have been found, Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems on the Alberta Plains," 65.

[57] Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems on the Alberta Plains," 65.

Abundant and relatively small sedentary herds of cow and bulls were ideal for jumping or pounding. Hunters could maintain a camp near one jump or pound while scouts located cow herds and began luring them towards the kill site. The small, relatively inactive and predictable herds were more manageable than the larger, more active herds of summer.[60] Most of the drive process involved carefully enticing a herd towards the chosen kill site; only the final, climactic episode involved a stampede. Thus, the habits of winter herds were more suitable than those of summer herds for bison drives.[61]

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[58] See Verbicky-Todd, *Communal Buffalo Hunting*, 34-36; George W. Arthur, Michael Wilson and Richard G. Forbis, *The Relationship of Bison to the Indians of the Great Plains* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, 1975), 82; Jack Brink, personal communication.

[59] Arthur, *Introduction to the Ecology of Early Historic Bison Hunting*, 106.

[60] Daniel Williams Harmon described the herds in winter as very approachable, "tame and harmless," while "in the fore part of the Summer at their rutting season it is quite the reverse"; W. Kaye Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon 1800-1816* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 42.

Understandably, horses were of far less use in winter than they were in summer. Horses are poorly adapted to strenuous use during cold weather. Natives of the northwestern plains often used dogs to pack belongings, in order to reduce stress and minimize mortality among their horses during winter. During his visit of 1787-8, David Thompson found that the Peigan "Hunted and killed on horseback to the middle of January, when the herds were driven into Pounds to the middle of March."[62] Alexander Henry the Younger noted that "Horses are sometimes made use of to collect and bring in the Buffalo [to pounds] but this manner never answers so effectually as people on foot, as it causes them to withdraw in a short time at a great distance. When horses are used the Buffalo are absolutely drove into the pound, whereas when the other method is pursued they are in a manner enticed to their own destruction."[63]

During most winters bison maintained themselves on the northwestern plains reasonably well. Still, mature animals lost weight gradually during the course of a winter as they drew on fat reserves to make up for the lack of quality forage. Bison numbers declined each year during the winter. More importantly, the surviving bison, fat at the beginning of winter, were lean by spring. Thus, each animal's potential to provide sustenance for humans diminished to its lowest level in late March or early April. Old lean specimens could be found at all times of the year, but they were common in late winter and early spring. Early spring could be especially difficult outside the chinook belt where the crusty snows of March made foraging difficult. John Palliser noted that "I have killed many fat buffaloes in the months of January and February; after which I have invariably found them lean, and sometimes seen the ground sprinkled with blood from the hardness of the surface, which the animal tries to shovel aside with its nose."[64] On the northeastern plains Alexander Henry the Younger hinted at the significant mortality among bison in the late winter and early spring. On 28 February 1801, he noted that "wolves and Crows are very numerous feeding on the many Buffalo carcasses that lay in every direction."[65] A month later, he remarked about the vast numbers of dead bison floating down the Red River. These animals had fallen through the weakened ice, and were too weak to rescue themselves. Henry wrote, "I am informed that almost every spring it is the same, but not always in such immense numbers as this."[66] As Henry implied, long and severe winters resulted in the greatest mortality among the bison. After an unusually cold and snowy winter and late spring in 1788-89 William Tomison noted the great numbers of drowned bison along the banks of the Saskatchewan River near its forks.[67] In April 1810, Henry mentioned that a North West Company man at Fort Vermilion had visited the plains where he "saw upwards of sixty dead Buffalo laying in the Plains, which generally is the case at this season of the year, when they are weak, and once they lay down, they cannot rise again."[68]

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[61] When William Pink witnessed several Blackfoot/Cree bison pounds in January 1770 he noted that his hosts drove in herds of 15, 11, 20, 21, and 25 bison. He also noted an occasion upon which a herd broke through the pound and escaped because too many were driven into the pound at once, HBCA B.239/a/63 7, 11, 16, 19, 20, and 6 January 1770.

[62] Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 51.

[63] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger 1799-1814*, 374. Fidler witnessed the Peigan using horses to drive bison near the Porcupine Hills during the exceptionally warm winter of 1792-3.

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[64] Spry, *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition*, 21.

[65] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 109.

[66] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 115.

George Grinnell wrote that during the winter the Blackfoot "would kill large numbers of buffalo, and would prepare great stores of dried meat."[69] Present knowledge of human metabolism explains why Natives on the northern plains tended to store dried meat and other foods in the fall and winter, even if they believed they could kill large numbers of the animals throughout the year. Body fat in some game animals, including bison, can drop so low by late winter or early spring that their meat, if eaten indiscriminately, cannot sustain human life. Furthermore, since protein-rich food stimulates metabolism, consumption of it actually increases caloric requirements and hastens starvation at a time when food is most scarce. In an effort to satisfy energy needs, the digestive system begins to convert proteins into carbohydrates, but this is an inefficient process that produces an accumulation of nitrogenous end products that poison the body, particularly when fluid intake is low.[70]

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[67] HBCA B.121/a/3, 24 May 1789. Later that spring James Gaddy expressed his belief that the exceptionally large number of dead bison ("some thousand") floating down the river that spring were "owing to the Sevearness [*sic*] of the winter," B.121/a/4, 6 June 1789. Reference to dead bison along the North Saskatchewan can also be found in John MacDonald of Garth's notes quoted in A. S. Morton, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, xlvii-xlviii.

[68] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 18 April 1810.

[69] Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 234.

To avoid protein poisoning Plains Natives had to maintain their intake of fat and carbohydrates during late winter and early spring. In some regions they did this by trading for high-carbohydrate agricultural products. For example, Cree and Assiniboine bands of the northeastern plains, and the Crow of the northwestern plains, acquired corn and other foods from the Mandan and Hidatsa. Many bands of the northwestern plains, however, had only very limited access to trade in agricultural products. It was fortunate for these bands that aspects of climate and vegetation (already discussed) likely enabled bison to maintain greater stores of body fat than they could on the northeastern plains. This would explain why it seems that the inhabitants of the northwestern plains did not rely as much on dried meat and pemmican as did groups farther east, but the Blackfoot did make a special effort to kill cow bison in the early autumn when their fat content was the highest. They dried and stored this fat and meat to be consumed when the bison had become lean. They rendered most into jerky, but further processed some into pemmican, which contained a large amount of bison fat and grease together with dried berries. The Blackfoot also gathered, dried, and stored berries and roots (like the prairie turnip) for later use.

As the winter season wore on, hunters had to kill more and more bison to secure the same amount of food. Lean animals and lean cuts of meat would be abandoned. Archaeological and documentary evidence makes it clear that it was not uncommon for an entire animal to be abandoned or for only the tongue, backfat, and fetus to be consumed. Archaeological investigations of bison jumps show that Natives preferred to harvest and exploit cows, but especially fetuses, and perhaps young calves.[71] Documentary evidence suggests the same.[72] While visiting a Siksika bison pound near the Vermilion River in December 1809, Alexander Henry the Younger noted that, of the mangled carcasses in the pound, "the Bulls were mostly all entire, and none but good Cows were cut up."[73] HBC servant Thomas Stayner noted that while hunting at Manchester House in February 1790 he and Thomas Spence had spent a half hour stalking a herd of bison on their hands and knees through deep snow, but "when we came within Gun Shot of the Buffalo [we] found the whole herd so poor [that they were] not worth firing at. We started them a considerable distance then returned home."[74] Hunters sought cows because they were in better condition than bulls in the winter, but also because fat distribution in cows made their meat easier to exploit.[75] Alexander Henry the Younger noted that "The Cow Buffalo have frequently *depouille* [backfat] of this [two inches] thickness, and some have been known to have even three Inches, but this is a rare thing to be found. The common condition is from one to Two Inches. A bull seldom has any extraordinary back fat; their fat is principally to be found in the inside of the animal"[76] While wintering with Sakatow's Peigan band on 10 February 1793, Peter Fidler noted that his hosts were "remarkably fond of [calves] even when not more than the size of a quart pot they eat them. The greater part of the Cows the Indians now kill is merely for nothing else but for the calf."[77] After particularly severe winters and late springs, the developing fetuses and the non-pregnant cows may well have been the only source of fatty fresh meat.[78] Understandably, the Natives of the plains would look longingly for the first green growth of spring, and the knowledge that freshly burned prairie would quicken this growth must have induced them to set the dormant grasses on fire in the spring. Shortly after, the sight of verdant prairie and young bison calves would renew the spirits of winter-weary communities.

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[70] John D. Speth and Katherine A. Spielmann, "Energy Source, Protein Metabolism, and Hunter-Gatherer Subsistence Strategies," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 2 (1983): 1-31.

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[71] Arthur, Wilson, and Forbis, *The Relationship of Bison to the Indians of the Great Plains*, 30.

[72] The examples which follow are focussed on winter, but it is apparent that it was common for northwestern plains Natives to take only the choice cuts of meat in all seasons. François-Antoine Larocque, who visited the Crow in the summer of 1805 noted that they took "but the fattest and cut part of an animal," Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 209.

[73] Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 21 December 1809.

[74] B. 121/a/5, 19 February 1790. On 5 May of the same year Stayner recorded that he killed two bulls at the Eagle Hills but neither were fit to eat. This was before the spring growth had begun in that vicinity. (It was an unusually late spring, see B.121/a/4, 24 May 1790).

Winter saw diverse human communities meet along the margins of the plains. Bands that avoided the open plains during winter encountered other bands that had moved southward from the subarctic forests or eastward across the Rocky Mountains.[79] They wintered on the margins of the plains for the same reasons the plains bands did: to exploit the plains bison there. All of these bands were familiar with the wood or mountain bison (*Bison bison athabascae*) and the plains bison whose combined range extended well beyond the northwestern plains (Figure 2.5).[80] South of the Bow River, where grasslands penetrated the mountainous valleys, bison and bison jumps were common.[81] At least until the end of the pedestrian era, bison were also found, even if they were not plentiful, still farther south on the Columbia Plateau west of the continental divide.[82] Indeed, archaeologists have found bison jumps west of the continental divide.[83]

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[75] See B.121/a/5, 11 January 1790. Bulls, however, were harvested in winter to extract the fat from the marrow bones, B.121/a/5, 25 January and 5 March 1790.

[76] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 210 (18 July 1806).

[77] HBCA E 3/2 10 February 1793.

[78] After the unusually cold and snowy winter of 1767-8 plains Natives complained that there were few bison to be found and the ones that could be found were in poor condition.

Thus, during winters, plains bands met subarctic and transmountain bands along the margins of the plains. The different groups often profited from peaceful interaction that included trade, but they could also meet in hostility. Plains bands also coalesced

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[79] Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, Ch. 2 deals with patterns of interaction in the parkland region north of the plains.

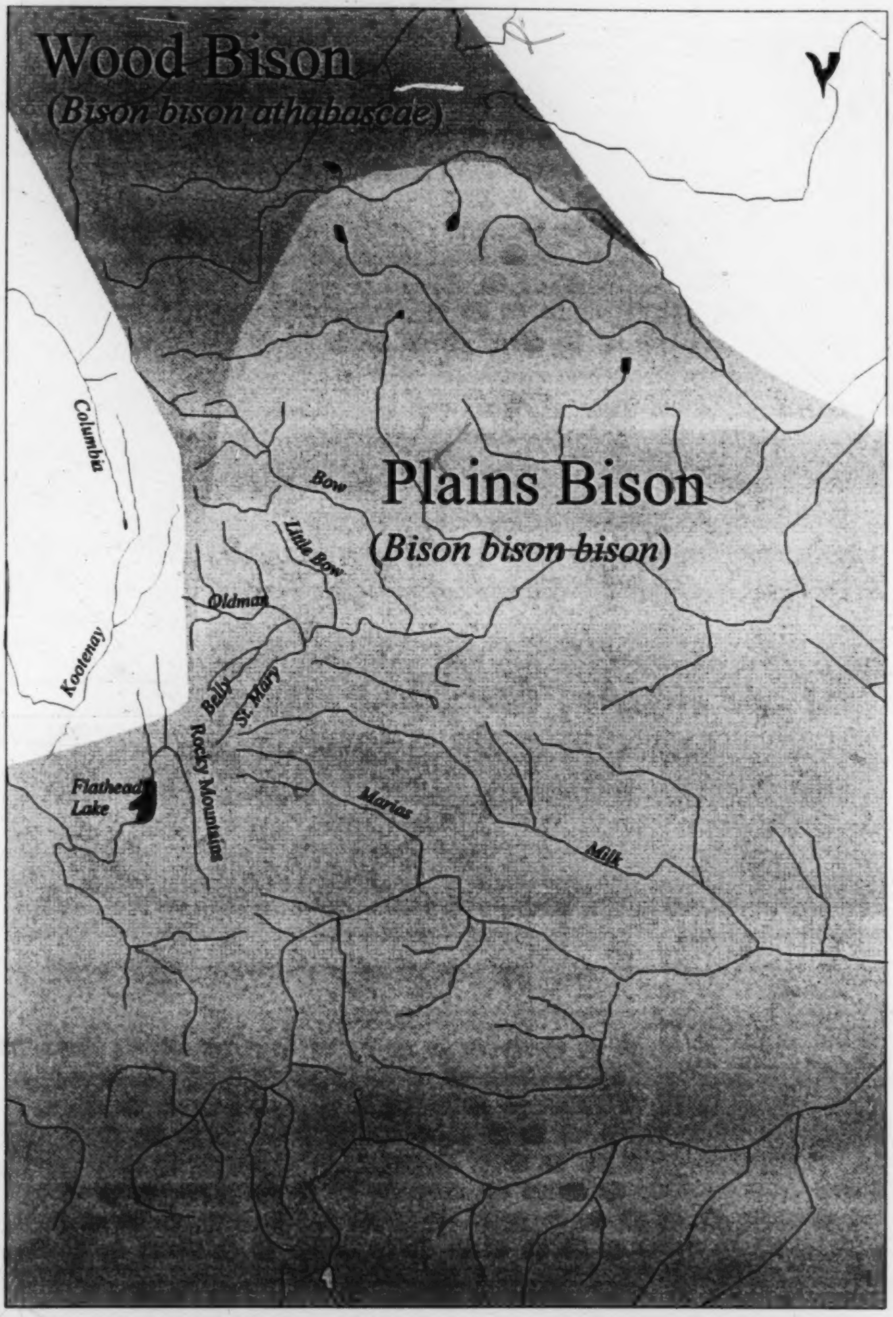
[80] Alexander Henry the Younger found bison and bighorn sheep "very numerous" at the Kootenay Plains along the North Saskatchewan River in 1811; Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 506.

[81] Victor G. Hopwood, ed., *David Thompson: Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971; 224; B.O.K. Reeves, "Bison Killing in the Southwestern Rockies," in Davis and Wilson, *Bison Procurement*, 78.

[82] Robert Butler, "Bison Hunting in the Desert West before 1800: The Paleo-Ecological Potential and the Archaeological Reality," in Davis and Wilson, *Bison Procurement*, 106-12. In 1792 the Peigan told Peter Fidler that there was "not a single Buffalo" west of the Rockies in the vicinity of the Oldman River basin, HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 31 December 1792.

[83] Duke and Wilson in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 63.

Figure 2.5
Range of Bison at the End of the Pedestrian Era


Wood Bison
(Bison bison athabascae)
Plains Bison
(Bison bison bison)
Columbia
Kootenay
Bow
Little Bow
Oldman
Belly
St. Mary
Rocky Mountains
Flathead Lake
Marias
Milk

Adapted from C. Gates, T. Chowns and Hal Reynolds, "Wood Buffalo at the Crossroads," in John E. Foster, Dick Harrison and I.S. MacLaren, eds., *Buffalo* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992), 140.

during winter. With bison concentrated in a small area, plains bands could cooperate in communal hunts. Certainly during the equestrian era, and probably earlier, gathering in relatively large communities during the winter while their neighbours outside the region were widely dispersed in small bands, encouraged plains bands to launch long-distance winter war and raiding excursions against their vulnerable enemies.

The northwestern plains were an oasis for bison and for the humans that hunted them. Predictable and seasonal variations in the concentration of the bison encouraged humans to follow similar seasonal rhythms. These annual cycles ensured that the region's relatively small population frequently encountered neighbours from within and outside the plains, and influenced their relations. Because of the bison's abundance the northwestern plains bands enjoyed certain advantages over their neighbours. Especially towards the north, west, and southwest of the northwestern plains bison density declined rapidly. Hunting bands in the neighbouring areas were generally much smaller than those of the northwestern plains. If all else were equal, small bands found it difficult to displace large bands. Nature then, gave residents of the region a military advantage over their neighbours. Nevertheless, the environment did not simply determine the course of human history. Humans did not, and could not, live in timeless harmony with their surroundings and their neighbours. They repeatedly seized opportunities and overcame challenges that the environment and their human neighbours, presented them. Over many centuries, communities moved onto the northwestern plains from every direction. Some did so peacefully, some aggressively. They responded to the environment in different ways. It is important to understand not only the rhythms that the natural world seemed to encourage, but also the depth and dynamism of human history.

Chapter Three

Trade, Warfare, and Diplomacy from A.D. 200 to the eve of the Equestrian Era

> Naw peu ooch eta cots from whence this river [Oldman River] Derives its name ... is a place where Indians formerly assembled ... to play at a particular game. ... On my enquiring concerning the origin of this spot the Indians ... said that a White man ... came from the South many ages ago — & built this for the Indians to play at that is different nations whom he wished to meet here annually & bury all anamosities [*sic*] betwixt the different Tribes — by assembling here & playing together — they also say that this same person made the Buffalo — on purpose for the Indians, they describe him as a very old white headed man.
>
> Peter Fidler, 1792[1]

The environment of the northwestern plains regulated human activity in the region, but it left considerable latitude for human innovation. The abundance of the bison and the annual cycle of the bison herds influenced patterns of human interaction, but these patterns were not timeless and unchanging. The human history of the northwestern plains is both ancient and dynamic. Since time immemorial, distinct human communities adapted to the environment of the northwestern plains in very different ways. Relations among and between these peoples spanned the spectrum from peaceful and cooperative to hostile and competitive. The northwestern plains were the common and contested ground of diverse communities. The history of warfare, diplomacy, and trade is an ancient one. The archaeological record enables us to reconstruct the history of inter-community affairs on the northwestern plains only incompletely, but evidence of the history of human interaction in the late pedestrian era is tremendously valuable, because it gives us a sense of the depth, dynamism, and complexity of human history in the region.[2]

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[1] Peter Fidler, "Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Moutains in 1792 & 3" HBCA E. 3/2, 31 December 1792.

[2] The "late pedestrian era" here refers to the period from the arrival of bow and arrow technology in roughly A.D. 200 to the arrival of the horse in roughly 1700. Thus it replaces the term "late prehistoric era" that archaeologists commonly use.

In the early part of this century many scholars, including prominent anthropologists such as Clark Wissler, Robert Lowie, and Ralph Linton, struggled to correct the image of the North American Native as a bloodthirsty savage. Since then many anthropologists have defended Romantic interpretations that downplayed the significance or even denied the evidence of warfare among indigenous societies before contact with Euroamericans.[3] More recently, realist scholars have shown that depictions of early plains warfare as a virtually bloodless prestige sport accord poorly with the archaeological evidence. They emphasize the importance of warfare, and its practical and rational motivations.[4] It is clear that warfare, including high casualty warfare and the mutilation of victims, long predates the arrival of Euroamericans to the Great Plains.[5] Warfare on the Great Plains was a serious matter. This is an important observation, for it acknowledges the humanity of the Natives who inhabited the region. Prominent archaeologist Bruce G. Trigger has explained that

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[3] The best example of a Romantic portrayal of indigenous warfare is Harry Holbert Turney-High, *Primitive Warfare: Its Practice and Concepts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971 [1949]). This was long the only general survey of warfare in non-state societies. Also see George Bird Grinnell, "Coup and Scalping Among the Plains Indians," *American Anthropologist* 12 (1910): 296-310; and Marian Smith, "The War Complex of the Plains Indians."

[4] The best example of a realist interpretation of indigenous warfare is found in Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). An early realist interpretation of Plains Native warfare can be found in Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*. One such study that deals with such warfare before 1500 can be found in Douglas B. Bamforth, "Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Violence: Precontact Warfare on the North American Great Plains," *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 29 (1)(March 1994): 95-116. Critics of Romantic interpretations have written some helpful literature reviews. See W. W. Newcomb Jr., "A Re-examination of the Causes of Plains Warfare," *American Anthropologist* 52 (1950): 317-30; and Thomas Biolsi, "Ecological and Cultural Factors in Plains Indian Warfare," R. Brian Ferguson, ed., *Warfare, Culture, and Environment* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), 141-68. Commenting on the continuity in methods of mutilation in warfare on the Great Plains, Patrick Willey noted that "it is apparent that mutilating the dying and recently dead did not originate during historic times ... by the fourteenth century ... the general patterns are well-established"; Patrick Soren Willey, *Prehistoric Warfare on the Great Plains: Skeletal Analysis of the Crow Creek Massacre Victims* (New York: Garland, 1990), 152.

> Archaeology does not offer a picture of prehistoric native people that conforms to the ideal of the noble savage or with any other stereotypes that White men have entertained about them. Instead it shows specific groups of human beings facing and solving problems in a distinctive and effective manner.[6]

By romanticizing Natives we deny their essential humanity as much as we do when we portray them as cruel and irrational savages.

While archaeological evidence establishes that warfare had long been a feature of life on the Plains, historical trends in warfare are not easy to discern. The evidence does suggest that the intensity and frequency of warfare was not continuous over time and space. Warfare was more common when populations were under stress.[7] It was probably more important among sedentary villages than among band communities. It seems that where population densities were lower and communities smaller and more mobile, warfare was generally less frequent. Warfare is dangerous and costly for any community, but its potential risks are greater and its likely rewards smaller among small nomadic communities than among larger sedentary ones. The temporary or permanent loss of a few adult males was inevitably far more significant for small bands than it was for large bands or villages. Moreover, especially during the pedestrian era, small mobile bands could expect few rewards from war expeditions. Target groups could be difficult to find. A war party might exact revenge but even complete victory brought few other tangible gains. Victors could expect little booty; mobile communities accumulated little surplus food and amassed few material possessions. Similarly, victors realized little tangible territorial gain or increased access to resources.

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[5] Bamforth, "Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Violence," *passim.*

[6] Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, 110.

[7] Bamforth, "Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Violence," *passim.*

As one might expect, the evidence suggests that warfare was less frequent on the northwestern plains during the pedestrian era than it was in areas of the plains where human settlements were larger and more sedentary, and less frequent than it was during the subsequent equestrian era. In the early part of the twentieth century, Flathead informants told James Teit that the arrival of the horse greatly changed the frequency of warfare on the northwestern plains. They told him that before the arrival of horses "peace generally prevailed among the various tribes and there was no continual warfare like that which developed after the introduction of the horse and the migrations of eastern tribes westward and of Blackfoot tribes southward."[8] The archaeological evidence that small summer camps were common in the pedestrian era, reinforces the belief that warfare was less significant in the pedestrian era. This evidence, however, is not unambiguous. In both the pedestrian and equestrian eras, dire necessity sometimes forced hunting communities to disperse, even at the risk of exposing themselves to danger of attack by a larger party.

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[8] James Teit, "The Salishan Tribes of the Northern Plateaus," *Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report* 45 (1927-28): 306. This view is echoed in Blackfoot oral traditions described in Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 242.

The argument that warfare became more frequent in the equestrian era should not obscure the fact that it played an important role in the late pedestrian era. Documentary and archaeological evidence confirms it. In the 1780s, Young Man (Saukamappee), an elderly Cree-born Peigan leader recalled a particular battle that took place near the Eagle Hills during the late pedestrian era. The Cree participants in the battle already had access to iron, but in other respects the battle was, according to Young Man, typical of warfare before the arrival of horse and gun. According to Thompson's recollection of Young Man's story, spies of a Peigan-Cree war expedition

> had been out and had seen a large camp of the Snake Indians on the Plains of the Eagle Hill, and we had to cross the River in canoes, and on rafts, which we carefully secured for our retreat. When we had crossed and numbered our men, we were about 350 warriors (this he showed by counting every finger to be ten, and holding up both hands three times and then one hand) they had their scouts out, and came to meet us. Both parties made a great show of their numbers, and I thought that they were more numerous than ourselves.
>
> After some singing and dancing, they sat down on the ground, and placed their large shields before them, which covered them: We did the same, but our shields were not so many, and some of our shields had to shelter two men. Theirs were all placed touching each other; their Bows were not so long as ours, but of better wood, and the back covered with the sinews of the Bisons which made them very elastic, and their arrows went a long way and whizzed about us as balls do from guns. They were all headed with a sharp smooth, black stone (flint) [perhaps obsidian] which broke when it struck anything. Our iron headed arrows did not go through their shields but stuck in them; On both sides several were wounded, but none lay on the ground; and night put an end to the battle, without a scalp being taken on either side, and in those days such was the result, unless one party was more numerous than the other. The great mischief of war then, was as now, by attacking and destroying small camps of ten to thirty tents, which are obliged to separate for hunting.[9]

Young man implies that warfare became more frequent and deadly in the equestrian era, but this passage also emphasizes continuity in warfare from the late pedestrian to the early equestrian era.[10] Rock art reinforces Young Man's portrayal of warfare in the pedestrian era. At many locations on the northwestern plains, rock art depicting shield bearing pedestrian warriors reveal that warfare was an important aspect of life on the northwestern plains before the arrival of the horse (Figure 3.1). The shield bearing pedestrian warrior is by far the most common, and perhaps the oldest, motif in the over ninety rock art sites on the high plains of Montana and southern Alberta.[11] J. D. Keyser has argued that the nature of the pictographs and petroglyphs at the Writing-On-Stone site along the Milk River suggests that during the pedestrian era war honours were less important for the acquisition of status in society than they were to become in the equestrian era.[12] On the other hand, Stuart Conner argued that the depictions of pedestrian warriors were probably autobiographical. He also claimed that some portrayals of pedestrian warriors included coup sticks.[13] Evidently then, warfare in the

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[9] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative,* 328-340.

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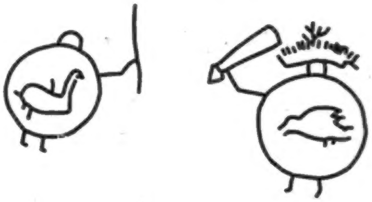
[10] This evidence will be discussed in later chapters.

[11] Stuart Conner and Betty Lu Conner, *Rock Art of the Montana High Plains*, (Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara, 1971), 14, 16; Thelma Habgood, "Petroglyphs and Pictographs in Alberta," *Archaeological Society of Alberta, Newsletter* 13 & 14 (Summer 1967): 1-40. Rock art does not give a comprehensive portrait of life on the plains in the pedestrian era — depictions of bison and tipis are rare — but it does suggest that warfare was an enduring facet of the human history of the northwestern plains.

[12] J. D. Keyser, contrasts what he interprets as ceremonial art of the pedestrian era with the biographical art of the equestrian era in "The Plains Indian War Complex and the Rock Art of Writing-On Stone, Alberta, Canada," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 6 (1979): 41-8.

[13] Conner and Conner, *Rock Art of the Montana High Plains*, 14, 17.

Figure 3.1
Petroglyph of Shield Bearing Warriors in Hand to Hand Combat



This petroglyph from Writing-on-Stone near the Sweetgrass Hills, shows two pedestrian shield bearing warriors in hand to hand combat, using a lance and a club. Redrawn From J. D. Keyser, "Writing-On-Stone: Rock Art on the Northwestern Plains," *Canadian Journal of Archaeolgy*, 1 (1977): 68.

pedestrian era had social and ritual, as well as military and economic importance.

Douglas B. Bamforth has generalized that "cultural-ecological research in anthropology makes it clear that humans rarely engage in extremely expensive patterns of behaviour without very good reason."[14] If parties could resort to less dangerous forms of aggression or alternate forms of dispute resolution, they generally did. For example, one party might achieve certain aims yet avoid a direct military conflict by threatening and intimidating another, or by burning the prairie near the camp of rivals. Sometimes groups at enmity would settle scores by gaming together.[15] Alternately, parties might exchange gifts and smoke tobacco together to atone for offences and restore or establish cordial relations. The archaeological evidence of these kinds of interactions is inevitably small, and at present, it remains very difficult to interpret for the northern plains.[16] Still, the facts that Euroamericans recorded evidence of the aggressive use of fire, and of interethnic gambling, almost as soon as they encountered Natives on the northwestern plains, and that Euroamericans were unlikely to have introduced these customs, imply that practices like these were well established by the late pedestrian era.

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[14] Bamforth, "Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Violence," 112.

[15] See the epigram to this chapter.

[16] Some promising work has been published on the southern plains and southwest. See Katherine A. Spielmann, "Late Prehistoric Exchange between the Southwest and Southern Plains, *Plains Anthropologist* 28 (102)(November, 1983): 257-72.

Communities interacted not only competitively but also cooperatively. Trade, including long distance trade, has an ancient history on the northwestern plains, and it became increasingly elaborate after about two or three thousand years.[17] Much of the trade may have been in perishables and thus is archeologically invisible, but the surviving evidence proves that residents of the northwestern plains traded for many resources and goods, including apparent luxury items, that were not available on the northwestern plains. For example, dentalium shells from the Pacific coast were imported to the northwestern plains hundreds of years before the arrival of the horse.[18] Many of the trade networks that existed in the late pedestrian era (Figure 3.2) remained important after the arrival of the horse.

In sum, the pedestrian era on the northwestern plains was marked by the same range of human interaction that marked the equestrian era. The arrival of horses, Euroamerican goods, and Euroamericans themselves, may have been very significant in

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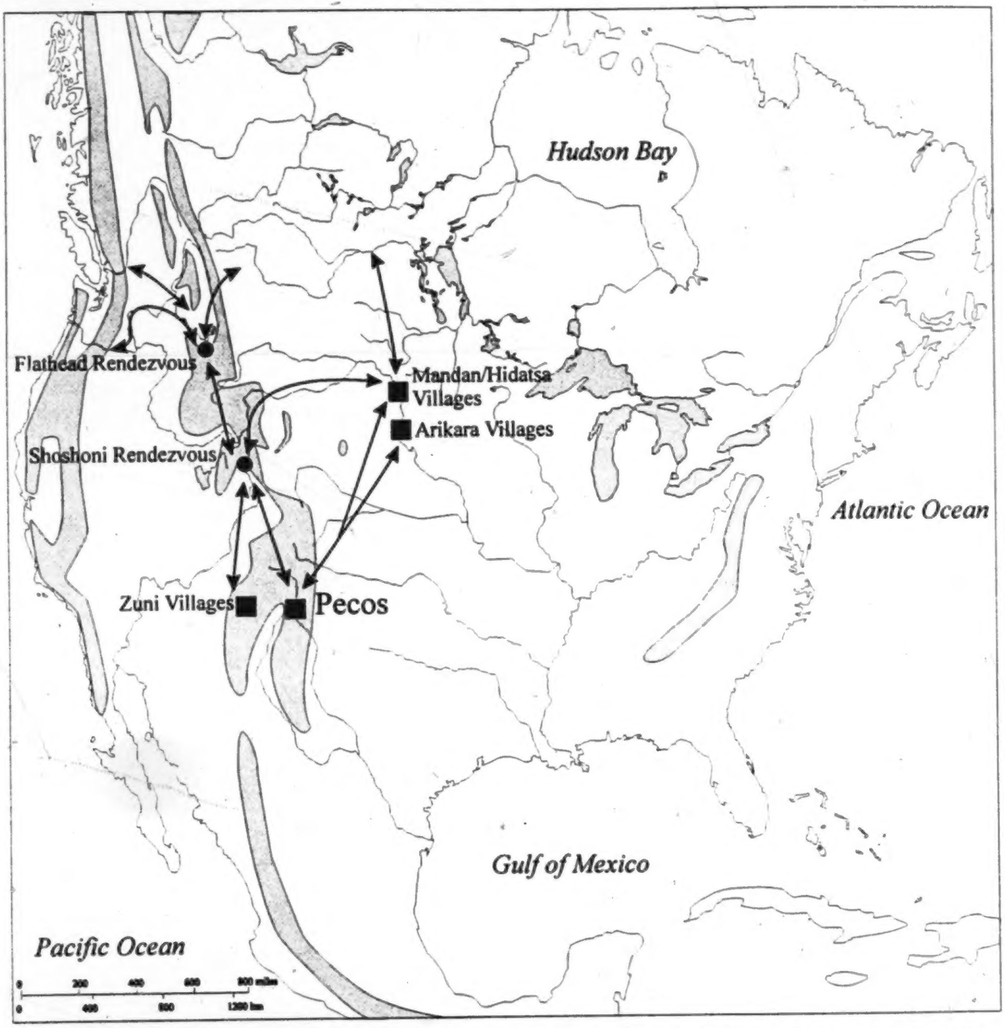
[17] B.O.K Reeves, "Communal Bison Hunters of the Northern Plains," in L.B. Davis and B.O.K. Reeves, eds., *Hunters of the Recent Past* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1990), 184; Jack Brink and Bob Dawe, *Final Report of the 1985 and 1986 Field Season at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Alberta*, (Edmonton: Archaeological Society of Alberta, 1989), 298.

[18] Philip Duke and Michael Clayton Wilson, "Late Prehistoric Cultures on the Montana Plains: From the Selkirk Mountains to the Bitterroot Range," in Karl H. Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500: The Archaeological Past of Historic Groups* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 60.

Figure 3.2
Primary Trade Networks at the End of the Pedestrian Era


Hudson Bay
Flathead Rendezvous
Mandan/Hidatsa Villages
Arikara Villages
Shoshoni Rendezvous
Atlantic Ocean
Zuni Villages
Pecos
Gulf of Mexico
Pacific Ocean
0 200 400 600 800 miles
0 400 800 1200 km

Adapted from William R. Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870," in Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed., *Hanbook of North American Indians* Vol. 4 *History of Indian-White Relations* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 352.

the history of the northwestern plains, but they initiated neither long distance trade nor warfare. Unfortunately, although it is not difficult to establish that trade, warfare, and diplomacy were important to pedestrian plains societies, it is difficult to trace and explain changing patterns in human interaction.

The Northwestern Plains During the Late Pedestrian Era

Not long ago, scholars assumed that the Native history of the northwestern plains was both recent and static.[19] Archaeologists have now dispelled these notions. We know that hunting communities occupied the northwestern plains since shortly after the end of the last ice age. Thus, by about ten thousand years ago, when the northwestern plains became a region of grasslands, humans already inhabited the region. The borders and constitution of these grasslands continued to change over the next millennia, but the region acquired many of its unique environmental characteristics thousands of years ago. Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence for the earliest millennia of human occupation makes it impossible to speculate on patterns of human interaction. What the evidence does show is that human societies became increasingly sophisticated in their ability to subsist in the region. They began using bison jumps at least 5700 years ago.[20] In contrast to the case of the southern plains where climate shifts periodically made communal bison hunting impossible, Natives on the northwestern plains developed increasingly effective subsistence strategies over the period of millennia. About 4800 years ago they began producing the pemmican that became an important a food source during the leanest periods of the year.[21] Evidence from the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump suggests that pemmican production increased dramatically at the beginning of the late pedestrian era.[22] By easing the year-round reliance on bison meat, and facilitating trade in meat products, pemmican allowed the development of large semi-sedentary winter encampments consisting of at least fifty tents.[23]

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[19] See William J. Byrne, "An Archaeological Demonstration of Migration on the Northern Great Plains," in Robert C. Dunnell and Edwin S. Hall, Jr., eds. *Archaeological Essays in Honor of Irving B. Rouse* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers 1978), 247-73.

[20] Brink and Dawe, *Final Report*, 296.

One of the most fascinating puzzles in the history of the northwestern plains during the pedestrian era relates to the arrival of the bow and arrow to the region. Most archaeologists agree on aspects of the development. Bow and arrow technology first appeared on the northwestern plains between A.D. 150 and 250. Until that time, hunters had used either hand-propelled spears or atlatls — dart throwers that permitted hunters to propel darts much further and with more power than by they could throw spears.[24] According to many archaeologists, the coming of the bow and arrow was a turning point that facilitated the development of the classic pedestrian Plains Indian culture.[25] It coincided with a dramatic increase in population of the northwestern plains. Thomas Kehoe has argued that the "complex, ritualized, patterned" bison drives of the northern plains date from this period.[26] Both the number and size of human camps increased.[27] The arrival of the bow and arrow inevitably affected patterns of human interaction on the northwestern plains, but the archaeological evidence allows few firm conclusions about how it did so. We can be sure that groups who were accustomed to using atlatls did not quickly abandon them and embrace the bow and arrow technology. Neither did groups who possessed bow and arrow technology simply displace the prior inhabitants. The transition from atlatl to bow and arrow technology was a slow, complex, and uneven process. Evidently the bow and arrow and dart thrower were each well suited to subsistence in specific environmental contexts.

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[21] Reeves in Davis and Reeves, eds., *Hunters of the Recent Past*, 170.

[22] Brink and Dawe, *Final Report*, *passim*, but especially 296.

[23] Reeves in Davis and Reeves, eds., *Hunters of the Recent Past*, 170; Brink and Dawe, *Final Report*, 297-8, 302.

[24] *Atlatl* is the Aztec word for the dart thrower. The atlatl permitted hunters to inflict devastating injuries from a considerable distance.

[25] See George C. Frison, *Prehistoric Hunters of the High Plains* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 223-4; Thomas Kehoe, "Paleo-Indian Drives: Feasibility Studies," in Davis and Wilson, eds, *Bison Procurement and Utilization*, 82; and Reeves in Davis and Reeves, eds., *Hunters of the Recent Past*.

It was apparently an archaeological culture[28] known as Avonlea that introduced the bow and arrow technology to the northwestern plains. The oldest evidence of these people is from the dry mixed prairie zone east of the Cypress Hills, although archaeologists reject the notion that the group developed in that location.[29] But where did they come from? Their use of bow and arrow, the presence of dentalium shells and the commonness of obsidian in Avonlea sites suggests that they emerged from and were oriented towards the west. Evidence regarding the arrival of the bow and arrow to North America reinforces this conclusion. Inuit migrants apparently introduced the bow and arrow to the continent from the northwest. The earliest evidence of arrowheads in the northern periphery of the plains, the Great Basin, the Columbia plateau, and the eastern plains is later than the earliest evidence of this technology on the northwestern plains.[30] This suggests that bow and arrow technology arrived on the plains from the west. The technology had reached the Fraser Canyon by 350 B.C. and spread east into the interior in the early centuries A.D.[31] Evidently then, bow and arrow technology arrived on the plains from the west, but its archaeological manifestation leapfrogged from the Rocky Mountains to the northern mixed prairie. Environmental factors may help explain this puzzle.

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[26] Kehoe in Davis and Wilson, *Bison Procurement*, 79. Also see Thomas F. Kehoe, *The Gull Lake Site: A Prehistoric Bison Drive Site in Southwestern Saskatchewan* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1973), 195-6.

[27] Reeves in Davis and Reeves, eds., *Hunters of the Recent Past*.

[28] Archaeological cultures are defined differently than anthropological cultures. Archaeologists use the word *culture* to describe a set of related archaeological materials. Thus, although scholars assume that there is usually some connection between archaeological cultures and ethnicity, they acknowledge that the relationship is not straightforward. Thus, over the course of several centuries, an unknown number of distinct communities may have left artifacts now categorized as Avonlea artifacts.

In A.D. 200, societies archaeologists have named the Besant phase dominated much of the northern plains.[32] Had the bow and arrow been much superior to the dart thrower as a subsistence tool or military weapon the atlatl-hunting Besant groups would almost certainly have been forced to take up the superior technology or be displaced. Instead, the Avonlea culture first occupied the drier regions of the northern mixed prairie, leaving the apparently more populous Besant communities to exploit the most abundant bison herds along the margins of the plains. Then, over several hundred years, the Avonlea groups gradually expanded until they dominated the entire northwestern plains, from the North Saskatchewan River to the Yellowstone River basin.[33] Yet for centuries two groups of communities, employing different subsistence technologies (and a different material culture), co-existed on the northwestern plains, the atlatl hunters apparently following a primarily foothills-prairie annual cycle, while the Avonlea adopted a parkland-prairie settlement pattern. The long-term coexistence of groups depending on the bow and arrow with those depending on the dart thrower suggests that each technology was well suited to particular environments and situations. The atlatl may have been ideally suited to the uneven terrain and large bison populations of the more westerly areas. It was a powerful subsistence tool. The relatively large and heavy dart could penetrate bison bones and flesh causing devastating injury to the prey.[34] Groups possessing sophisticated knowledge of meat preservation methods, and occupying regions where bison density and topographic relief made bison jumps particularly reliable, may have found no reason to abandon the atlatl as a weapon. In other areas, groups may have found the bow and arrow more suited to their needs.

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[29] It appears that few now accept the earlier view of Reeves that the oldest Avonlea artifacts are from the western foothills, J. Roderick Vickers, "Cultures of the Northwestern Plains: From the Boreal Forest to Milk River," in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 17. Note, however, that Duke and Wilson argue for the presence of Avonlea in the Rocky Mountain trench as early as A.D. 200; Duke and Wilson in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 65. Greiser also noted the discovery of other very early Avonlea components in the foothills in Sally T. Greiser, "Late Prehistoric Cultures on the Montana Plains," in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 41.

[30] Vickers, in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 16.

[31] Brian O. K. Reeves, *Culture Change in the Northern Plains 1000 B.C. - A.D. 1000* (Edmonton: Archaeological Survey of Alberta, 1983), 162-3.

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[32] Dale Walde, David Meyer, and Wendy Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," *Revista de Arqueologia Americana* 9 (July-December 1995): 7-66. Other societies represented by the Pelican Lake phase, formerly widespread on the northern plains, also continued to survive in uplands of the upper Missouri and Yellowstone River basins until A.D. 1000, Greiser, in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500- 1500*, 41.

[33] Walde, Meyer, and Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," 20.

The Avonlea phase slowly expanded from a core area that was relatively dry and flat. There were far fewer natural bison jumps in this region than in the foothills of the Rockies. While Besant peoples could rely largely on bison jumps, Avonlea hunters made greater use of bison pounds. The Avonlea people were fully as sophisticated at communal bison hunting as were Besant hunters. One Avonlea site near the South Saskatchewan River includes remarkable earthen and stone walls built to impound bison.[35] The smaller number of possible kill sites and the greater effort required to prepare these sites, required greater care and attention to detail in this environment.

While the Avonlea groups were consummate communal hunters, the bow and arrow may have been particularly valuable to individual hunters. Hunting communities in the drier and flatter prairies were necessarily less reliant upon communal bison hunts than those in the foothills. The string of a bow can be slowly drawn and released with precision while the archer remains concealed and relatively still. Thus, the bow and arrow enabled individuals to approach and kill bison without spooking a herd.[36] The bow and arrow, weapon of stealth and accuracy, may have been the ideal subsistence tool on the flatter drier plains.

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[34] Frison, *Prehistoric Bison Hunting*, 223.

[35] See John H. Brumley, *Ramillies: A Late Prehistoric Bison Kill and Campsite Located in Southeastern Alberta, Canada* (Ottawa: Archaeological Survey of Canada, 1976).

The Avonlea hunters also exhibited greater flexibility in their subsistence activities than did the Besant hunters. They were far more likely to exploit the fish resources of the rivers and lakes of the northern plains than were the Besant peoples.[37] They were also very skilled at communal pronghorn hunts.[38] This may help account for their success on the drier portions of the northwestern plains even though they had little access to the fescue grasses in either summer or winter.

Regrettably, archaeologists know little about the relationships between the Avonlea and Besant communities. They have found little evidence that members of the two groups ever camped together. Furthermore, the fact that the material cultures tended not to merge suggests that they rarely intermarried or mingled. Beyond this, however, the available evidence forbids all but speculation. It seems unlikely, however, that the two waged incessant warfare, for the two communities shared much of the northwestern plains for hundreds of years. The Avonlea peoples gradually spread outward from their initial core area between A.D. 200 and 1000. By about A.D. 800 Avonlea people had begun leaving artifacts in the Kootenay basin west of the Rockies.[39] Perhaps the dry Scandic climate episode that lasted from about A.D. 250 to A.D. 850 reduced bison populations and thus reduced the opportunity for communal bison hunts. Under the drier conditions, the bow-hunting Avonlea peoples with the broader subsistence base probably enjoyed a growing advantage over atlatl hunters.[40]

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[36] Frison, *Prehistoric Bison Hunting*, 224.

[37] David Meyer and Scott Hamilton, "Neighbors to the North: Peoples of the Boreal Forest," in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 108; Walde, Meyer, Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," 23.

[38] L.B. David, and J. W. Fisher, "Avonlea Predation on Wintering Plains Pronghorn," in Leslie Davis, ed., *Avonlea Yesterday and Today: Archaeology and Prehistory*, (Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Archaeological Society, 1988), 101-18.

Most archaeologists believe that emergence of the Old Women's phase on the northwestern plains and the waning of the Besant phase between A.D. 750 and 850 does not represent the invasion of a new society but represents members of the Besant groups incorporating the bow and arrow into their material culture.[41] If this is so, the Besant groups on the drier and flatter parts of the northern plains appear to have adopted the bow and arrow before those in the foothills. This is to be expected if the bow and arrow was especially well suited to the drier and flatter areas. The Old Women's arrow tips were not crafted with the same skill and consistency as the Avonlea points. This fact does not appear to have been a significant factor, for after the Old Women's phase developed, the Avonlea phase began to wane, disappearing from the western plains around 1150.[42] What happened? The archaeological evidence provides few clues. Old Women's communities may have gradually eliminated or integrated Avonlea communities. Perhaps the Avonlea were driven southward and westward. Perhaps a combination of these events occurred with different bands following different paths. Some have argued that similarities between Old Women's ceramics and Avonlea ceramics suggest that members of the Avonlea societies contributed to the evolution of Old Women's material culture.[43]

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[39] Vickers, in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 16,

[40] This is the argument of Sally Greiser in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 42.

[41] Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 22.

[42] Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 19.

The Old Women's phase, expressed in several subphases, expanded over most of the northwestern plains between 1200 and 1750.[44] The fact that archaeologists have found metal projectile points and glass beads in a late Old Women's phase site near the South Saskathewan River in southeastern Alberta confirms that the Old Women's phase persisted into the dawn of the equestrian era.[45] Even as the Old Women's groups were expanding, however, other groups began exerting influence on the northwestern plains. Some brought with them new and effective subsistence strategies related to horticulture.

About five thousand years ago, Natives of the Tehuacán Valley near present-day Mexico City began cultivating corn.[46] After a long history there, corn cultivation spread into southwestern and eastern North America over many centuries. On the northern plains, in what some describe as one of the greatest achievements in plant breeding, aboriginal societies "transformed corn from a warm-weather plant which required high daytime and nighttime temperatures during a growing season of 150 days or more, to a tough, compact plant that matured in 60 days and resisted drought, wind, cool temperatures, and even frost."[47] Corn agriculture was central to the development of Mississippian cultures of the lower Mississippi Valley after A.D. 800. Foremost among the settlements of the Mississippians was a large urban cluster near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, known to archaeologists as Cahokia. Between 900 and 1300 Cahokia became the largest political chiefdom in the history of North America.[48] Around 1050 Cahokia entered its apogee. Situated at the hub of an immense trade and transportation network, the community of about 30,000 people participated in extensive trade oriented towards the north and northwest.[49] Mississippian influences evidently extended even to the northwestern plains, although to an unknown extent.[50] Shortly after the year A.D. 1100, as Cahokia was in its zenith, certain communities began settling in horticultural villages in the middle Missouri basin near the Knife and Heart Rivers.[51] There, using bison shoulder bones as hoes, they cultivated the easily-worked alluvial soils and planted a variety of corn distinct from that grown on the Mississippi bottom lands but perfectly suited to conditions on the middle Missouri. Northern flint corn resisted rotting in the cold wet soil of spring, and resisted summer drought. Thus, northern flint corn permitted the development of viable agricultural villages in scattered locations on the Missouri River near large bison herds. The self-sufficiency of these populations centers may have contributed to the decline of Cahokia by 1200.[52]

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[43] William J. Byrne, *The Archaeology and Prehistory of Southern Alberta as Reflected by Ceramics* (Ottawa: Archaeological Survey of Canada, 1973), 469-70, 559; Walde, Meyer, and Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," 22-3, 54.

[44] Old Women's phase artifacts are not found in the southeastern parts of the region including the Yellowstone basin. See Walde, Meyer, and Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," 25.

[45] J. Roderick Vickers, *Alberta Plains Prehistory: A Review*, (Edmonton: Archaeological Survey of Alberta 1986), 106.

[46] R. Douglas Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present* (University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1987), 7.

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[47] Hurt, *Indian Agriculture,* 62.

[48] Robert L. Hall, "Cahokia Identity and Interaction Models of Cahokia Mississippian," in Thomas E. Emerson and R. Barry Lewis, eds., *Cahokia and the Hinterlands: Middle Mississippian Cultures of the Midwest* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 33.

[49] Two collections focus on the relationship between the Cahokians and their northern neighbours, but neither discuss relationships beyond the region of present day South Dakota and Iowa. See, and James B. Stoltman, ed., *New Perspectives on Cahokia: Views from the Periphery* (Madison, Wisconsin: Prehistory Press, 1991); and Emerson and Lewis, *Cahokia and the Hinterlands.*

[50] Heather Ann Pringle, *In Search of Ancient North America: an Archaeological Journey to Forgotten Cultures.* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 160-3; Brink and Dawe, *Final Report,* 298-9.

The Middle Missouri villages exerted greater influence on the northwestern plains after 1200 than the Mississippians did before. The population of the Middle Missouri Villages was diverse. The founders were certain Siouan speaking groups ancestral to the Mandan and Hidatsa. The linguistic differences among the Hidatsa, Mandan, and other Siouans languages suggests that the ancestors of the Mandan and Hidatsa left the proto-Siouan homeland before the time of Christ. The differences between Hidatsa dialects and

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[51] W. Raymond Wood, ed., *Papers in Northern Plains Prehistory and Ethnohistory*, Special Publication of the South Dakota Archaeological Society No. 10, 1986, 7-9. The Initial Middle Missouri tradition appears to have originated in the Little Sioux and upper Des Moines River basins around A.D. 900 and expanded gradually up the Missouri Trench, Joseph Tiffany, "An Overview of the Middle Missouri Tradition," Guy E. Gibbon, ed., *Prairie Archaeology* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Publications in Anthropology No. 3, 1983), 89-90.

[52] Hall in Emerson and Lewis, *Cahokia and the Hinterlands*, 24-6.

Mandan also suggests that these two Siouan groups were separated for many centuries.[53] Nevertheless, the paths of the distinct communities converged again when they settled in the Middle Missouri Villages. It seems that ancestors of the Awatixa Hidatsa, evidently the first Hidatsa to arrive, were subsequently joined by forebearers of the Awaxawi Hidatsa and the "Hidatsa proper" or "Willow Indians" who may have arrived as late as the 1600s.[54] By that time, the ancestors of the Mandan had joined them. Throughout the next centuries, villagers integrated members of various other communities into their society and the Middle Missouri Tradition became what some archaeologists describe as a "cultural melting pot."[55] A cultural "mosaic" might be a more accurate term, for despite their proximity over a long period, the villagers maintained their distinct languages and dialects even as they left Middle Missouri Tradition artifacts that are indistinguishable from one another. Indeed, the three Hidatsa groups themselves settled in three groups of villages that maintained distinct mutually intelligible dialects throughout their period of settlement on the Missouri River despite their physical proximity and constant interaction.[56]

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[53] Schlesier in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 336. Hidatsa and Mandan are mutually unintelligible, Michael L. Gregg, *An Overview of the Prehistory of Western and Central North Dakota* (Billings, Montana: Bureau of Land Management, Cultural Resources Series No. 1, 1985), 32.

[54] Frank H. Stewart, "Mandan and Hidatsa Villages in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Plains Anthropologist* 19 (1974): 292; Dale Russell, "The Puzzle of Henry Kelsey and His Journey to the West," in Henry T. Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Country of Good Report."* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1993), 84.

[55] Tiffany, "An Overview of the Middle Missouri Tradition," 107.

Natives north of the Knife and Heart Rivers never adopted substantial agriculture. Between about 1150 and 1200 some members of the Missouri villages apparently introduced horticulture to the Souris, Assiniboine, and Red River valleys to the north, where some other local groups like the Blackduck and Duck Bay peoples, apparently joined them. Other migrants from the south, beginning around the year 1000 and intensifying with the decline and collapse of Cahokia and the Mississippian centers around A.D. 1300, added to the diversity of societies in the Red and Souris River basin.[57] Yet, agricultural activity appears to have ceased north of the Missouri after 1500.[58] The advent of horticulture on the northern plains came during a relatively warm and wet period known as the neo-Atlantic episode (approximately A.D. 850-1250). Perhaps the onset of the drier and cooler Pacific episode (A.D. 1250-1550) made substantial corn agriculture in this region unfeasible as it did in other places.

After Natives north of the Missouri River abandoned horticulture, the Middle

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[56] W. Raymond Wood and Alan S. Downer, "Notes on the Crow-Hidatsa Schism," *Plains Anthropologist, Memoir 13* 22 (1977): 83-100.

[57] B. A. Nicholson, "Interactive Dynamics of Instrusive Horticultural Groups Coalescing in South-Central Manitoba During the Late Prehistoric Period — The Vickers Focus," *North American Archaeologist* 15 (1994): 103-7; B. A. Nicholson, "Orientation of Burials and Patterning in the Selection of Sites for Late Prehistoric Burial Mounds in South-Central Manitoba," *Plains Anthropologist* 39 (148)(1994): 161-71.

[58] Anthony P. Buchner, "The Geochronology of the Lockport Site," *Manitoba Archaeological Quarterly* 12 (2) (April 1988): 27-31; Beverly A. Nicholson, "Ceramic Affiliations and the Case for Incipient Horticulture in Southwestern Manitoba," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 14 (1990): 33-59. According to these articles, evidence for corn agriculture at the Lockport site (just north of present-day Winnipeg) is conclusive while evidence in the Assiniboine and Souris valley is only suggestive.

Missouri Villagers remained the northernmost horticulturalists. Their distinction as the northernmost agriculturalists on the northern plains afforded the villagers certain opportunities and challenges similar to those experienced by the Huron, the northernmost horticulturalists in the Great Lakes region. The Middle Missouri Villagers, in contrast to agriculturalists on the central plains (Pawnee, Omaha, Ponca and Oto), became the focus of an extensive trading network oriented towards the north. Hunting societies were their natural trading partners. At the same time, the northernmost horticulturalists were prone to crop failures and local resource depletion. Poor crops and a shortage of timber forced the periodic movements of villages. More important, the Middle Missouri villagers always, but especially in years of bad harvests, supplemented their horticultural produce by hunting and gathering.[59] The villagers never abandoned the hunt. Instead, the drier and cooler climate that prevailed after 1250 made horticulture more tenuous and bison hunting relatively more rewarding. Indeed, the climate changes appear to have caused significant pressure on communities in many areas of the Great Plains. Much farther south some communities abandoned their villages; others fortified theirs as population pressures caused warfare.[60] Between 1300 and 1500 the Middle Missouri villagers themselves attempted to establish new villages in more favourable locations downstream but were prevented from doing so by Caddoan speaking members of the Coalescent

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[59] One should not lose sight of the fact that archaeologists estimate that the subsistence of the Middle Missouri peoples was derived about equally from agriculture and big game hunting, Tiffany, "An Overview of the Middle Missouri Tradition," 89.

[60] Michael L. Gregg, "Archaeological Complexes of the Northeastern Plains and Prairie-Woodland Border, A.D. 500-1500," in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 88; Douglas B. Bamforth, "Indigenous People, Indigenous Violence," 104-5.

Tradition, probably ancestral to the modern Arikara, who occupied villages farther south. In part of an ongoing struggle for agricultural land, it may have been the Middle Missouri villagers that killed and mutilated about five hundred villagers at Crow Creek in about the year 1325.[61]

The archaeological evidence suggests that, with their efforts to move onto more favourable agricultural land to the south thwarted, the Hidatsa developed a subsistence strategy that combined their horticultural efforts with substantial dependence on hunting and gathering and on trade with other hunting and gathering societies on the northern plains. An archaeological phase that archaeologists call the Mortlach phase was crucial to the trading network centered on the Missouri villages. Between 1300 and 1750 the Mortlach people expanded onto much of the northern plains driving Old Women's communities westward out of the South Saskatchewan River region.[62] They apparently hunted bison on the open prairies in summer and primarily in riverine environments in the winter, although northern groups may have wintered in the parkland. Mortlach sites are very large, displaying evidence of intensively processed bison bones, perhaps reflecting the efforts of these people to produce preserved meats that could be brought to the agricultural villages to the south or consumed during the long, cold winters.[63] The variation among Mortlach artifacts betrays these people's involvement in trade and other kinds of peaceful exchange. The northern Mortlach peoples, who were more oriented towards the parklands, apparently frequently visited and traded with the Selkirk peoples, who were expanding westward through the forests and parkland from the Saskatchewan River.[64] South of the parkland, Mortlach artifacts contain pottery that is clearly connected to the Middle Missouri Villages. Evidently, then, the Mortlach peoples acted as a conduit for the movement of people, goods, and ideas between the mobile hunting societies and the semi-sedentary horticultural populations on the northern plains. Their occupation of the northern plains, including parts of the northwestern plains, reached its maximum extent in the late pedestrian era. In fact, some of the late Mortlach sites contain European trade goods that they probably acquired from the Cree in the late pedestrian era.[65]

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[61] Bamforth, "Indigenous People, Indigenous Violence," 102-10; Willey, *Prehistoric Warfare on the Great Plains*. The Crow Creek massacre as the most dramatic archaeological record of pedestrian-era warfare in North America, provides convincing evidence that high casualty warfare and the mutilation of victims, long predates the arrival of Euroamericans.

[62] Walde, Meyer, and Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," 33.

Some time after 1600, another archaeological phase appeared on the northwestern plains. While the Mortlach groups were affiliated with the Middle Missouri Villages, the One Gun phase almost certainly represents actual migrations of Middle Missouri groups onto the northwestern plains. The One Gun phase also differs from the Mortlach phase in that it includes actual fortified village plans far removed from the Middle Missouri Villages. It also differs in its distribution. Whereas the Mortlach phase is typical of the northeastern and north central plains, the One Gun phase is typical of the northwestern plains. Despite the fact that the One Gun peoples erected earthlodges, there is as yet no evidence that they made any attempt at growing corn. The One Gun people were probably nomadic hunters who erected fortified villages with the intention of occupying them seasonally.

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[63] David Meyer, "People Before Kelsey: An Overview of Cultural Developments, in Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 64.

[64] Meyer in Epp, *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 64; David Meyer and Henry T. Epp, "North-South Interaction in the Late Prehistory of Central Saskatchewan," *Plains Anthropologist* 35 (132) (1990): 321-42; Meyer and Hamilton, in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 127; Walde, Meyer, and Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," 44.

[65] Meyer in Epp, *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 66.

The Hagen Site, on the lower Yellowstone River near the present site of Glendive, Montana, probably dates from the period between 1675 and 1700. It evidently combined mud houses and tipis. Archaeologist William Mulloy interpreted this evidence, and the evidence of small-scale horticulture, as transitional from sedentary horticulturalism to nomadic hunting. Still, Mulloy recognized that this was primarily a bison hunting community.[66] Bison scapula hoes suggest that these people planted something there, (perhaps tobacco) but there is no evidence that it was corn.[67] The amount of sherds found at the Hagen site suggests that its occupation spanned more than one season.[68]

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[66] William Mulloy, *The Hagen Site: A Prehistoric Village on the Lower Yellowstone* (Missoula: University of Montana Publications in the Social Sciences, 1942).

[67] According to Lewis Henry Morgan, the Crow, probable descendants of the One Gun peoples, were known to use bison scapula during the equestrian era to cultivate small plots of tobacco, Lewis Henry Morgan, *The Indian Journals, 1859-62* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 150. Morgan's source was Robert Meldrum, an American Fur Company employee who had married a Crow woman and had lived in Crow country for thirty-six years. Indeed, even the Blackfoot, who by then had easy access to other tobacco, still cultivated their own tobacco as late as 1793; HBCA E.3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 16 March 1793. Also see Wood and Downer, "Notes on the Crow-Hidatsa Schism," 83-100.

The One Gun peoples established the Cluny earthlodge village on the Bow River not far east of the present city of Calgary, Alberta, during the early equestrian era, probably around 1740.[69] It is an enigma. It is the most northwesterly known fortified village. The increased mobility afforded by the horse may have made this settlement possible.[70] Characteristics of this fortified village, like that of the Hagen site suggest that it was almost certainly not an attempt to establish an horticultural settlement. There is no evidence that the builders ever intended to grow crops. Archaeologists have found no evidence of horticultural tools, nor any plant remains there.[71] This should not be surprising. It is difficult to imagine that the people of the Middle Missouri tradition could have believed that corn horticulture could succeed at that location.

Indeed, the site may not represent an attempt to establish a permanent self-contained village at all, but merely a camp that could be reoccupied seasonally. Archaeologists found pottery sherds similar to those of the Middle Missouri tradition at the site, but recovered no tools associated with skin preparation, butchering, or wood working.[72] Nonetheless, the effort expended in construction suggests that the builders intended it to be more than a transitory camp. Evidence suggests that the site was occupied for no more than a few months, probably during a single spring. It was apparently never reoccupied. Still, the Cluny people clearly relied on the bison for food. Evidently they killed the bison in the field, and brought the choicest and most portable cuts to the village. What they took to the village they used very thoroughly, even shattering bones to extract marrow.[73] Cluny was not unique. It is only the farthest flung of several mud house sites on the northwestern plains that are known in the documentary and archaeological record. In 1800, Peter Fidler saw "at a very great place for buffalo crossing" on the South Saskatchewan River that there were "3 *Mud houses* on this side amongst a few poplars, they are of a circular form about 9 feet diameter & 4½ high, they appear to be nearly 20 years old, they are said to have been built by a small war party from the Mis sis soury river, who live in these kind of habitations."[74] In 1802, Charles Le Raye saw what he understood to be Crow winter camps on the Bighorn River. He described them as "sunk three feet below the surface of the ground, but otherwise are built nearly similar to those of the Gros Ventres [Hidatsa]."[75] In October 1805, in a coulee near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers, François-Antoine

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[68] Ann M. Johnson, "The Problem of Crow Pottery," in Leslie B. Davis, ed., *Symposium on the Crow-Hidatsa Separations*, special issue *Archaeology in Montana* 20 (3) (September-December 1979): 23.

[69] Horse bones and fragments of brass or copper were found at the site, Richard G. Forbis, *Cluny: An Ancient Fortified Village in Alberta* (Calgary: Department of Archaeology of the University of Calgary, 1977), 16.

[70] Byrne, *Archaeology and Prehistory of Southern Alberta*, 560.

[71] Forbis, *Cluny*, 6, 67.

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[72] Forbis, *Cluny*, 72.

[73] Forbis, *Cluny*, 69.

[74] Alice M. Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence: 1795-1802* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), 266, 266n. Emphasis in the original.

[75] Charles Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," *South Dakota Historical Collections* (1908): 172.

Larocque discovered “a lodge made in the form of those of the Mandans & Big Belly’s [Hidatsa] (I suppose made by them) surrounded by a small Fort. The Lodge appears to have been made 3 or 4 years ago but was inhabitted [*sic*] last winter. Outside of the fort was a kind of stable in which the[y] kept their horses. There was plenty of Buffalo heads in the fort, some of them painted Red.”[76]

The One Gun phase probably was not a transition from sedentary horticulturalism to nomadic hunting so much as from pedestrianism to a nomadic equestrianism particularly suited to the environment of the northwestern plains. Inspired by their roots on the Middle Missouri, the One Gun communities probably attempted to rely on semi-permanent seasonally occupied villages established at strategic locations in valleys where bison were common. Perhaps they assumed that by allowing hunters to transport bison to the villages from greater distances, horses would aid their attempts to establish a semi-sedentary way of life. In fact, as happened elsewhere on the Great Plains, equestrianism worked to the advantage of nomadic rather than sedentary groups, and the innovation of the One Gun peoples did not long survive the equestrian transition. Although Cluny was occupied only briefly, artifacts found at Cluny suggest that the villagers’ connections to the Missouri villages had weakened. Knife River flint, available near the Hidatsa villages, is rare or absent. Those who built the villages did not carry their tools from the Middle Missouri but manufactured them from local materials or from obsidian that they gathered or traded from its source at the headwaters of the Yellowstone River.

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[76] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 197.

Complementing the mostly local lithics is a small amount of obsidian.[77]

Throughout the pedestrian era diverse human communities migrated onto the northwestern plains. The environment militated against the development of horticulture in the region itself, but permitted distinctly different bison hunting subsistence economies. Residents of the northwestern plains struggled and cooperated among themselves, and participated in trade networks that extended far beyond the northwestern plains. At least one successful group of hunters existed on the northwestern plains in a symbiotic relationship with horticulturalists on the Middle Missouri. Even if it is impossible to reconstruct the dynamic relationships that must have existed between and among human communities we can conclude that for many centuries diverse communities experienced both peaceful and hostile relationships in the region. The degree of diversity that archaeologists have been able to discover is especially impressive in light of the fact that archaeological evidence tends to obscure short term developments and to mask the ethnic variability possible within a single archaeological culture. Although only a few archaeological cultures dominated the northwestern plains on the eve of the equestrian era, other evidence reveals that the region was home to many ethnic groups that spoke dialects of Algonkian, Siouan, Numic, Salishan, Athapaskan, and Kutenian languages. An understanding of the history of these various communities is essential to an understanding of the history of the northwestern plains during the equestrian era.

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[77] Vickers, *Alberta Plains Prehistory*, 107.

Chapter Four
Ethnic Groups of the Northwestern Plains to 1750

> The Indians of the Plains are of various Tribes and of several languages which have no affinity with each other.
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> The Stone Indians are a large tribe of the Sieux Nation. ... They have always been, and are, in strict alliance with the Nahathaways. ... The Fall Indians, their former residence was on the Rapids of the Saskatchewan, about 100 miles above Cumberland House. ... The Sussees are ... brave and manly. [T]he three tribes of the Peeagan ... all speak the same tongue, and their hunting grounds [are] continguous to each other; these were formerly on the Bow River, but now [extend] southward to the Missisourie.
>
> All these Plains, which are now the hunting grounds of the above Indians, were formerly in full possession of the Kootanaes, northward; the next the Saleesh and their allies, and the most southern, the Snake Indians and their tribes.
>
> David Thompson[1]

By 1700 the northwestern plains had long been the common and contested home of many human communities. It would remain so in the equestrian era. The arrival of the horse was perhaps the most dramatic milestone in the history of the Great Plains during the bison era. The horse encouraged completely new and rapidly changing patterns of trade, warfare, and diplomacy. Still, an understanding of human interaction in the early equestrian era depends on an examination of the roots of the ethnic groups that resided on the plains at the time. Historical documents become useful for interpreting the history of the northwestern plains beginning in the final years of the pedestrian era. It is important to understand, however, that the archaeological evidence for the pedestrian era does not blend seamlessly with the documentary evidence. In fact, the discontinuities and apparent contradictions between the archaeological evidence and the documentary evidence are daunting. Nonetheless, knowledge of the backgrounds of specific Native societies is crucial for an understanding of their behaviours and relationships during the equestrian era.

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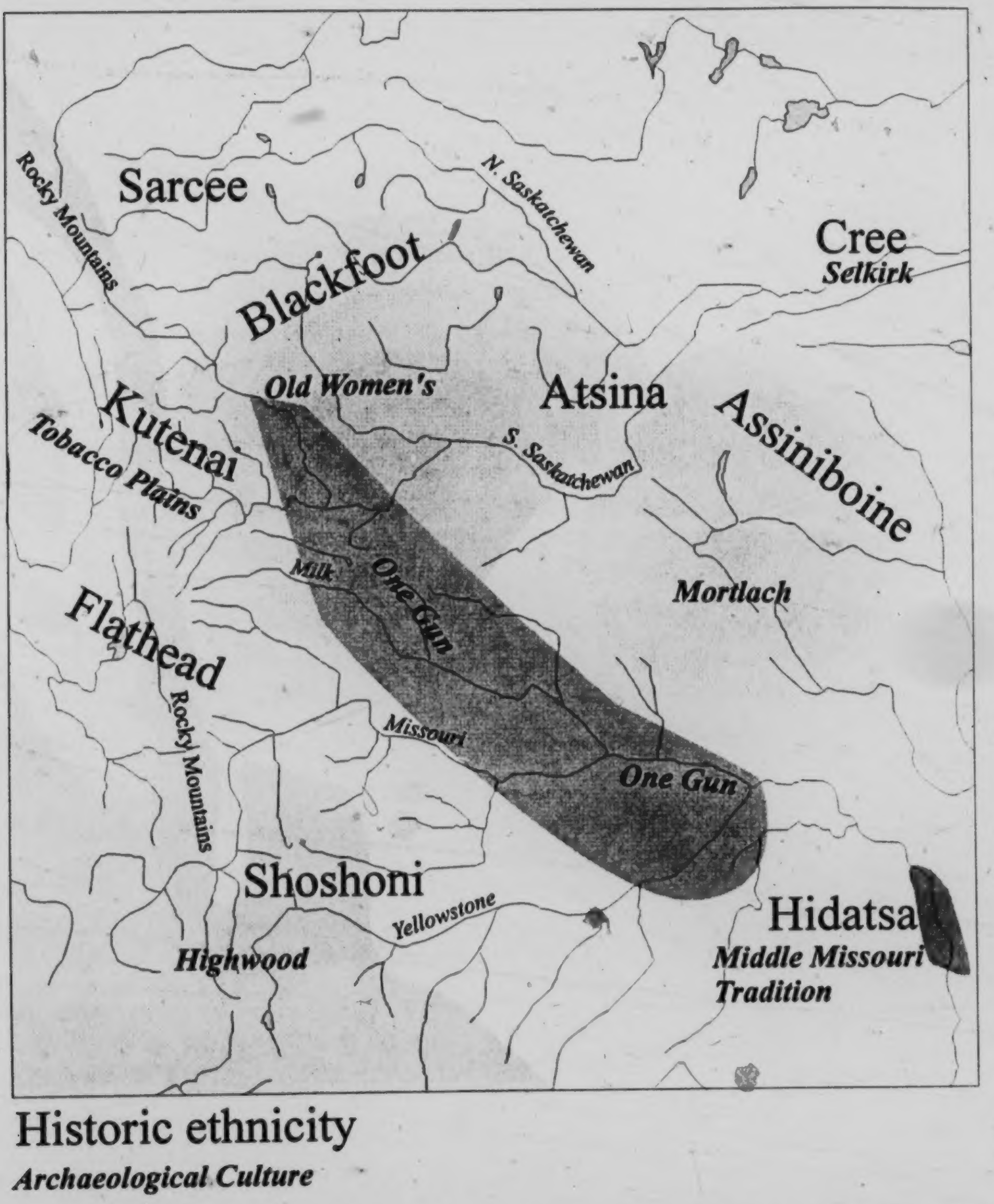
[1] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 326-8.

The archaeological evidence reveals that two archaeological phases, Old Women's and One Gun, dominated the northwestern plains at the dawn of the equestrian era (Figure 4.1). Having emerged around A.D. 750 the Old Women's phase dominated most of the northern plains around 1300, but the Mortlach phase gradually expelled Old Women's communities from all but the northwestern plains by the end of the pedestrian era. At that time, the Mortlach and Selkirk phases reached their maximum westward expansion on the northern plains although they remained only along the periphery of the northwestern plains. Even in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century a new phase, known as the One Gun phase, emerged. The One Gun people constructed mud houses in the upper Missouri River basin and in the South Saskatchewan River basin.

In contrast to the archaeological evidence, the documentary evidence reveals that many cultural groups occupied the northwestern plains when the horse arrived in the region (Figure 4.1). Several others migrated into the region by 1750. Scholars have long attempted to harmonize the documentary and archaeological evidence but their attempt has produced some hotly contested debates. Difficulties lie in part with the fact that archaeological cultures are not equivalent to anthropological cultures. We know that human societies can diverge, split, fuse, or amalgamate, but evidence for these processes is often hidden in the archaeological record. For example, archaeologists cannot distinguish between the material culture of the Mandan and Hidatsa, even though they were distinctly different peoples. On the other hand, groups belonging to a single ethnic group might have had very different material cultures. Individuals and groups of one

Figure 4.1
Location of Archaeological Phases and of Ethnic Groups on the Northwestern Plains, 1700-50.


Rocky Mountains
Sarcee
N. Saskatchewan
Cree
Selkirk
Blackfoot
Old Women's
Atsina
Assiniboine
Kutenai
Tobacco Plains
S. Saskatchewan
Milk
One Gun
Mortlach
Flathead
Rocky Mountains
Missouri
One Gun
Shoshoni
Yellowstone
Highwood
Hidatsa
Middle Missouri Tradition
Historic ethnicity
Archaeological Culture

Adapted from Walde, Meyer, and Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," and Martin Magne, "Distribution of Native Groups in Western Canada, A.D. 1700 to 1850," *Archaeology in Alberta: 1986* (Edmonton: Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Occasional Paper No. 31, 1987), 224.

culture could be integrated into and contribute to the development of "foreign" groups. Human societies at any given time have complex roots in various societies. For example, contemporary Blackfoot almost certainly have ancestors among the Kutenai, Flathead, Shoshoni, Crow, Cree, Nez Perce, and Sarcee, just as most of these groups have some Blackfoot ancestors. A recognition and acknowledgment of this complexity facilitates our ongoing efforts to reconcile the archaeological, linguistic and documentary evidence. Indeed, an understanding of the history of human interaction on the northwestern plains during the early equestrian era requires some knowledge of the history of those Native groups that occupied the region.

The Algonkians

Several Algonkian groups occupied the northwestern plains during the early equestrian era. Most linguists argue that all of the Algonkian speaking groups have roots in the proto-Algonkian homeland in what is now southern Ontario, (although others argue that this homeland encompassed the entire region southwest and west of Hudson Bay around 4000 B.C.). This would mean that all the Algonkian speakers of the northwestern plains migrated to the region from the northeast or east. They arrived, however, at different times.

There is a near consensus among archaeologists and historians that the historic Blackfoot developed from the Old Women's phase.[2] Even if the theory cannot be proven, little evidence undermines it. Certainly the archaeological, linguistic, oral, and written evidence support it. While central and eastern Algonkian languages (like Cree, Ojibwa, and Micmac) are very similar, the plains Algonkian languages (Blackfoot, Cheyenne, and Arapaho/Atsina) are very different from each other and from the central Algonkian languages.[3] This fact suggests that the Blackfoot have long been separated from other Algonkians. Evidently, then, the Blackfoot have ancient roots on the northwestern plains. Other Algonkians that occupied the region in the equestrian era, the Atsina, and Cree, migrated to the region more recently. Still, if we aim to understand the behaviour and relationships of these other Algonkians during the equestrian era, we must explore aspects of their history before they arrived in the northwestern plains.

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[2] Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 28. In fact, many archaeologists posit a link between the Besant, Old Women's, and Blackfoot, Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 10

When Euroamericans first identified the Atsina specifically in the 1770s, they occupied the region near the forks of the Saskatchewan River. The Ojibwa and Cree name for the Atsina alluded to the strong current found in the Saskatchewan River system near the forks.[4] Unfortunately, the earlier history of the Atsina is clouded by archaeological paucity and documentary ambiguity. Archaeologists have uncovered no archaeological remains on the northwestern plains that could be unique to the Atsina. Given the close association between the Atsina and Blackfoot during the equestrian era, the ancestors of the Atsina may have adopted and contributed to the evolution of the Old Women's phase. Whether or not the material cultures of the Blackfoot and Atsina had merged by the equestrian era, their affiliation became so close that observers and historians have frequently included the Atsina under the term *Blackfoot Confederacy*. While that term is misleading, the close relationship between the Blackfoot and Atsina is crucial for understanding Atsina history. Observers and historians have placed much less emphasis on the relationship between the Atsina and Arapaho, but this relationship too is important for understanding Atsina history.

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[3] Indeed, the Blackfoot language is so dissimilar to other Algonkian languages that many prominent early linguists did not perceive the connection. This is because the vocabulary of Blackfoot is so dissimilar to other Algonkian languages. It is in the grammar that the similarity becomes evident. See Hale, "Report on the Blackfoot Tribes," 701.

[4] The fur traders thus adopted this name which they translated as "Fall Indians," "Waterfall Indians," and "Rapid Indians." The documentary ambiguity surrounding the Atsina surrounds this name, for fur traders also referred to the Hidatsa as the "Fall Indians." For a discussion, see the discussion of the Atsina in Appendix A: "*Dramatis Personae*."

Despite their close affiliations, the Atsina and Blackfoot bands had very different languages and very different pasts. Atsina was mutually unintelligible with any other Algonkian language except Arapaho. Moreover, Arapaho and Atsina are dialects of a single language.[5] Indeed, according to Arapaho tradition recorded early in the twentieth century, the Atsina were merely the northernmost of the five closely related groups of Arapaho.[6] The judgement that the Atsina and Arapaho have common roots is unassailable.

While it is impossible to reconstruct conclusively the history of the two groups since their separation, linguistic and archaeological evidence, combined with oral traditions of the Atsina and Arapaho, have led some scholars to postulate that both the Arapaho and Atsina developed from the Duck Bay phase which appears to have emerged around A.D. 1250 in the interlake region of present day Manitoba from the Blackduck culture.[7] Linguistic evidence and the traditions of each group suggest the paths that they took. The ancestors of the Atsina became, likely by 1550, residents of the Saskatchewan River forks region.[8] Their linguistic kin, however, migrated towards the southwest. The Arapaho may well have settled in horticultural villages for a time before continuing their migration towards the southwest.[9] Perhaps it was on the northeastern plains[10] that they first encountered the Cheyenne and continued their southwestward migrations in company with the Cheyenne. At any rate, the association between Arapaho and Cheyenne bands is very old. The Arapaho, in the late nineteenth century, professed to have no memory of a time that they were not closely affiliated with the Cheyenne.[11]

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[5] Alfred L. Kroeber, "Ethnology of the Gros Ventre," American Museum of Natural History *Anthropological Papers* 1 (1908): 145.

[6] Alfred L. Kroeber, "The Arapaho," *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* 18 (1902): 5; Kroeber, "Ethnology of the Gros Ventre," 145. Two of the five groups eventually were absorbed into the others, leaving the Atsina, Northern Arapaho (who now share a reservation with the Wind River Shoshoni), and the Southern Arapaho (who now share a reservation with the Cheyenne in Oklahoma). The Atsina did not mention five groups when Kroeber did his field work among them in 1901.

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[7] The connection between Duck Bay and Blackduck is discussed in Meyer and Hamilton in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 120.

[8] Atsina traditions say they came to the Milk River from the north. Kroeber, "Ethnology of the Gros Ventre," 146.

[9] The Arapaho have some traditions of having been agriculturalists, and the discovery of Duck Bay ware at sites in the Assiniboine and Souris river valleys that may have been horticultural villages before 1500, offer tantalizing support to these suggestions. See Nicholson, "Ceramic Affiliations," 39. Mary Malainey has presented evidence that Atsina/Arapaho speakers resided with the Hidatsa villagers even into the reservation era, Mary E. Malainey, "The Gros Ventre/Fall Indians in Historical and Archaeological Interpretation," unpublished paper in the author's possession, 31-2.

[10] The Cheyenne also migrated to the western plains from the northeastern plains.

[11] James Mooney, "The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux outbreak of 1890," *United States Bureau of Ethnology Annual Report to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, 14 (1896): 954.

Interestingly, then, although the Arapaho and Atsina eventually formed affiliations with the Cheyenne and Blackfoot respectively, the Arapaho and Atsina languages resemble the Eastern Algonkian languages (Ojibwa and Cree) more than they do the other Plains Algonkian languages (Blackfoot and Cheyenne).[12] At some point the Arapaho divided again, with the Northern Arapaho eventually establishing themselves in the upper Platte River region.

The common roots of the Atsina and Arapaho are not mere curiosities, for there is little doubt that the Arapaho and Atsina maintained contact with one another throughout their separation, although, because of changing circumstances, the significance of their contacts may have ebbed and flowed in the pedestrian and equestrian era. In fact, through their Arapaho kin, the Atsina also had friendly relations with the Cheyenne during the equestrian era.[13] The Atsina then, had important friendly relations with other Native groups far outside the northwestern plains. These contacts would be tremendously important during the early fur trade era when the Atsina bands faced deteriorating military and diplomatic relations with their neighbours. Despite their residence on the northwestern plains, the Atsina were oriented towards and enjoyed access to the southern Great Plains in a way unlike that of any other groups in the region.

Archaeologists are in virtual consensus that the modern western Cree developed from the archaeological tradition known as Selkirk. This allows us to make several conclusions about the history of the Cree. Most important, archaeological evidence has forced historians and archaeologists to reexamine an earlier assumption that the westward expansion of the Cree into the Saskatchewan River basin and the western forests was induced by factors, like game depletion, related to the fur trade era.[14] The Selkirk peoples resided in the Saskatchewan River Valley below its forks by the 1400s and were expanding westward in the years thereafter. Clearly then, the westward expansion of the Cree into the forests and parklands north of the Great Plains predates their contact with Euroamericans. On a cautionary note, the archaeological evidence does *not* rule out subsequent migrations of Cree into areas occupied by Selkirk bands before 1600. The documentary evidence discussed later in this study shows that specific Cree individuals and bands continued to migrate westward from the Lake Winnipeg region during the fur trade era. Still, unless western Cree bands were also producing non-Selkirk archaeological artifacts, there is no reason to question the long-held belief, based on documentary evidence and oral traditions, that Cree bands became permanent residents of the northern plains only during the late pedestrian or early equestrian era.[15] The Selkirk peoples had longstanding north-south trading relations that extended as far as the Middle Missouri villages.

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[12] Alfred Kroeber, "Arapaho," 4.

[13] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 235-6.

The Siouans

All Siouan speakers apparently originating in a proto-Siouan homeland towards the southeast, but several of them are important in the history of the northwestern plains. The history of various Siouan communities on the northern plains is certainly related to the

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[14] See Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 5.

[15] See David Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*.

Middle Missouri Tradition, Mortlach phase, and One Gun phase, but scholars have interpreted the archaeological and documentary evidence in several ways. Few doubt that those who established the Middle Missouri Villages about nine centuries ago included ancestors of the Hidatsa. Primarily in their role as trading centres, these villages exerted a significant influence on the northern plains in both the pedestrian and equestrian eras.

Less significant than their role as traders, but important nonetheless, was the direct role the Hidatsa played in the history of the northern plains. Documents exist to place Hidatsa hunting communities on the northern plains in the late pedestrian era. In 1691 HBC employee, Henry Kelsey was sent inland from York Factory to encourage the "Naywatame Poets," to travel to Hudson's Bay to trade. On the northeastern plains Kelsey met tents of Naywatame Poets whom Dale Russell has convincingly argued were Hidatsa.[16]

The clear evidence that the Hidatsa were not restricted to the villages, but some of them also travelled well onto the northeastern plains in the pedestrian era has led some to suggest that the Mortlach phase represents this Hidatsa presence. Mortlach, however, is probably much more complex than this. About 10,000 people lived in the Mandan and Hidatsa villages at the Knife River and Heart River in the late pedestrian era. Given that resource depletion was evident in the surroundings of the much smaller villages of the post-1780 period, it is safe to assume that this was the case in earlier years.[17] Thus, even in normal years, Hidatsa hunting parties could well have been forced to travel considerable distances to hunt and were absent from the villages for several months at a time. In the late 1790s, Pierre-Antoine Tabeau noted that in years when the harvest was bad the villagers depended on bison but that bison were difficult to find in the vicinity of the villages. This meant that Hidatsa hunting parties could be gone for months at a time.[18] Evidently then, some bands of Hidatsa that depended wholly or largely on the plains hunt may have participated in a symbiotic relationship with the horticulturalists throughout the history of the villages.

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[16] Russell in Epp, *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 84; Dale R. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991), 210.

[17] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains,* 71, 74.

Hidatsa hunters were unlikely to have been primarily responsible for leaving Mortlach artifacts. The ancestors of the Assiniboine, another Siouan group, probably hold this distinction. The Assiniboine have a very different background from the Hidatsa. Linguistically, the Assiniboine are very closely related to the Nakota, also known as the Yanktonai or Yankton Sioux. While scholars formerly believed the schism to have occurred in the seventeenth century, it is becoming increasingly evident that the division occurred considerably earlier. Documentary evidence shows that Assiniboine bands occupied the parklands and forests of the lower North Saskatchewan River area by 1700.[19] There they had friendly relations with Cree bands. By 1754 Anthony Henday met "Eagle Indians" (an Assiniboine band that at that time "never had traded with any European or Canadian") on the margins of the northwestern plains.[20] The earliest

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[18] Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition*, 74.

[19] Russell, in Epp, *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 78-9.

[20] Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 331.

Euroamerican observers, distinguished between the North Assiniboine, oriented towards the parklands, and the South Assiniboine, oriented more towards the grasslands. The two groups seem to have exhibited marked cultural differences.[21] The evidence of the distribution and the internal diversity among the Assiniboine bands by 1700 certainly suggests that the Assiniboine presence on the northern plains considerably predates that time. The congruence between known positions and heterogeneity of the Assiniboine bands during the early equestrian era and the the distribution and diversity of the Mortlach peoples has led some scholars to conclude that the Assiniboine developed out of the Mortlach phase.[22] This is significant, for it suggests that the ancestors of the Assiniboine participated in extensive trade with both Cree and Hidatsa communities for several centuries before the beginning of the fur trade. The alternative explanation, that the Mortlach phase represents a significant Hidatsa presence on the northern plains, suggests that the Assiniboine rapidly invaded the northern plains upon the withdrawal of the Hidatsa in the earliest years of the fur trade.

The Hidatsa do appear to have been under considerable pressure as the fur trade began. In the late seventeenth century Henry Kelsey explained that Cree and Assiniboine bands were at odds with Naywatame Poets [Hidatsa] on the northeastern plains.[23] It is likely that these Cree and Assiniboine bands were protecting their privileged access to European goods on the Hudson Bay. If anything, pressure from rival groups, armed from the north by the Hudson's Bay Company and from the east by the French, limited Hidatsa access to the northeastern plains in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. This may partly explain the growing presence of Middle Missouri Villagers on the northwestern plains at the same time.

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[21] Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 53; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 181-4.

[22] Walde, Meyer, Unfreed, "The Late Period on the Canadian and Adjacent Plains," 49-50.

[23] Henry Epp, ed., "Henry Kelsey's Journals and Correspondence" in Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 219. For Russell's interpretation of the evidence, see Russell in Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 81.

The Crow were a Siouan-speaking community of hunter gatherers that developed from the Hidatsa. Their emergence on the northwestern plains, which dates from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, may be tied to the arrival of gun on the northeastern plains, and the horse on the northwestern plains. Both the Crow and the Hidatsa were present on the northwestern plains in the early equestrian era, the Crow as residents and the Hidatsa as warriors and raiders. They may have left archaeologically identical artifacts, including mud houses, at the same locations during the same period. The One Gun phase must certainly represent the Hidatsa/proto-Crow/Crow presence on the northwestern plains between 1675 and 1750. Some of the earthlodge villages on the northwestern plains probably represent the Hidatsa response to resource depletion near the villages. Perhaps their inability to continue hunting on the northeastern plains forced them to travel upriver instead. Travelling only with necessaries, villagers could resort to the mud houses seasonally to alleviate the demand on food stores at the villages, and return to the villages when their labour was required. If they were fortunate, they would be able to return to the villages with some meat. Thus, the arrival of the gun to the northeastern plains may have compelled the Hidatsa to withdraw from that region and redirect their hunting expeditions towards the west. Then the arrival of the horse to the western plains may have promoted the transformation of some of these migrant Hidatsa into the permanent residents known as the Crow.

The Crow ethnogenesis nearly coincided with the beginning of the equestrian era. Several of the most prominent students of Crow history have concluded that the emergence of the Crow on the northwestern plains occurred after 1650.[24] John Ewers argued as early as 1960 that the Crow emerged in the eighteenth-century, after the arrival of the horse, but before 1776.[25] Prominent archaeologist Raymond Wood came to the same conclusion. Using ethnohistorical evidence, Wood argued that the Crow emerged in the eighteenth century. The reports of the experienced fur trader, Edwin Denig, suggest that the division took place between 1750 and 1775. An estimate by James H. Bradley in the late nineteenth century gives the same approximate date.[26] Flathead informants told James Teit that the Flathead, who would later develop close relations with the Crow, first encountered the Crow in about 1750.[27] When Matthew Cocking enumerated the enemies of the Cree in 1772 he mentioned "four Nations, Kanapick Athinneewock or Snake Indians: Wahtee or vault Indians [Hidatsa] Kuttunnayewuck

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[24] Wood and Downer, "Notes on the Crow-Hidatsa Schism."

[25] John C. Ewers, ed., "Crow Indian Medicine Bundles," *Contributions form the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*, 17 (1960): 147.

[26] Bradley as quoted in Wood and Downer, "Notes on the Crow-Hidatsa Schism," 89.

[27] Teit, "The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateau," 304.

[Kutenai] and Nah-puck Ushquanuck or flat Head Indians."[28] The fact that Cocking did not explicitly identify the Crow has led some scholars to assume that the Crow were, or were included among the "Snake Indians."[29] A more likely argument is that Cocking's informants included the Crow among the "Vault Indians." Since Natives were still erecting earthlodges on the northwestern plains Cocking's informants may not yet have learned (or did not explain) that some of these Vault Indians had formed a separate identity. The Crow are not mentioned in other HBC journals from the 1770s and 1780s either. Strangely, however, the earliest reference to "Crow Indians" dates from 1716.

In 1716 a "Mountain Indian" arrived with a "Cocauchee or Crow Indian" "slave" woman.[30] Unless we accept the unlikely theory that this woman was not a member of the Crow community in question, we must date the emergence of the Crow earlier than did our earlier informants. If, as Arthur Ray has argued,[31] the Mountain Indians, who were clearly aware of horticultural villages, were Hidatsa, they certainly would have been aware of a Hidatsa-Crow schism before the Cree or Assiniboine were. They would also have been more likely to differentiate between themselves and the Crow. If the Mountain Indians were Hidatsa, the fact that the Crow woman was a slave suggests that the Hidatsa and Crow were at war at the time. Perhaps the division was recent. While the relationship between the Crow and the Hidatsa was not always friendly in the equestrian era, there is little record of warfare. The emergence of the Crow, however, was probably linked to a rupture between the Hidatsa and their western kin. According to Charles McKenzie, the Crow in 1805 had a tradition that the Crow-Hidatsa separation occurred when two Hidatsa brothers had been forced to flee the villages after they murdered their own relations. They had married Flathead women and developed a nomadic bison hunting lifestyle and dialect.[32] There are other accounts, both among the Crow and the Hidatsa, but all accounts suggest that the schism was accompanied by hostilities. Thus, the reference to the Crow in the HBC documents undermines the specific references to 1750 as the date of the schism, and supports Ewers's argument that the arrival of the horse was the catalyst in Crow ethnogenesis.

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[28] HBCA B.239/a/69, 1 December 1772. The lack of a reference to the Crow suggests that the Cree may not yet be aware that these people had formed a separate identity.

[29] For a defence and discussion of this theory see Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 28-30.

[30] HBCA B.239/a/2, 1 September 1716.

[31] Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55-7.

The Salishans

The Algonkians and Siouans that have occupied the northwestern plains, originated ultimately from the northeast and southeast respectively. Other groups entered the region from different directions. Linguists tell us that the proto-Salishan homeland was probably in the Fraser River and Puget Sound area.[33] The remarkable similarities among the Salish languages suggests that the proto-Salishan groups spread gradually outward from there, maintaining contacts with one another.[34] One of these groups, the Flathead, had a significant presence on the northwestern plains. The Flathead occupied the northwestern plains only seasonally during the equestrian era, and may not have occupied it year-round even in the pedestrian era. Still, they did form close ties during the equestrian era with Shoshoni and Crow bands. They also occupied areas west of the Rocky Mountains that were capable of supporting much larger horse populations than the northwestern plains. For this reason, the Flathead were the source of many of the horses that ultimately found their way, through trade or warfare, onto the northern plains. The history of the Flathead during the pedestrian era is difficult to trace because archaeologists have not been able to tie them very solidly to an archaeological culture.

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[32] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 249.

[33] Wayne Suttles and William W. Elmendorf, "Linguistic Evidence for Salish Prehistory," in *Symposium on Language and Culture: Proceedings of the 1962 Annual Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* (Seattle, American Ethnological Society, 1963), 45.

The Kutenai

If the history of the Flathead seems mysterious, the history of the Kutenai seems insoluble. An attempt to trace the history of the Kutenai backward in time moves quickly from certainty, to informed conjecture, to mere speculation. Documentary evidence, strengthened by Kutenai traditions, makes it clear that some Kutenai bands resided east of the Rocky Mountains permanently until the 1780s.[35] Although there are contradictory traditions, there are longstanding and persistent traditions among the Kutenai that indicate they were originally a plains people.[36] In one of the earliest ethnological reports on the

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[34] Suttles and Elmendorf, "Linguistic Evidence," 41.

[35] The evidence for this will be discussed in later chapters.

[36] Harry Holbert Turney-High, *Ethnography of the Kutenai*, (Menasha, Wisc: American Anthropological Association Memoirs No. 5, 1941), 10; Teit, "The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus," 304, 358. Also see Claude E. Schaeffer, "Plains

Kutenai, Alexander Chamberlain noted that "one of their myths ascribes to them an origin from a hole in the ground east of the Rocky Mountains."[37] Unfortunately, there is no archaeological evidence from the late pedestrian and early equestrian periods that might shed light on Kutenai presence on the northwestern plains. A very reasonable argument ties the Kutenai west of the continental divide with the Tobacco Plains archaeological phase. The Tobacco Plains phase, however, is restricted to the west side of the Rocky Mountains. Perhaps the plains Kutenai had a tool inventory that was indistinguishable from the Old Women's phase. Some have suggested that the Kutenai developed out of the Avonlea phase.[38] If this is so, the ancestors of the Kutenai have an important place in the history of the northwestern plains. Unfortunately, the evidence cannot confirm this theory.

Questions related to the Kutenai language and its relationship to other languages, may hold the key to an understanding of important aspects of human interaction in the late pedestrian era. The Kutenai language is categorized as an isolate with no proven derivation, but this designation is not meant to imply that the language developed in isolation from all others. It merely means that it is too dissimilar from any other languages to be classified with them. Even if the genetic roots of the Kutenai language are confirmed, the language will probably still be classified as an isolate. At present, the

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Kutenai: An Ethnological Evaluation," *Alberta History* 30 (4)(1982): 2.

[37] Chamberlain, "Report on the Kootenay Indians of South-Eastern British Columbia," 575.

[38] Reeves, *Culture Change in the Northern Plains,* and Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500.*

research into Kutenai linguistics is not sufficiently developed to make any firm conclusions, but studies do suggest that the Kutenai may well be an example of an ethnic group with deep roots to the west and to the east. Some promising studies suggest that the Kutenai language is genetically related to the Salishan languages but assumed its uniqueness as a result of many years of interaction with the Blackfoot.[39] The potential value of a resolution to this mystery is inestimable for an understanding of the history of the northwestern plains in the late pedestrian era.

The Athapaskans

Athropologists believe that all Athapaskan peoples have roots in the proto-Athapaskan homeland in northwestern North America near the Gulf of Alaska either along the coast or in the interior where the widest diversity of Athapaskan languages is found.[40] Linguistic and archaeological evidence also suggests that ecologically devastating volcanic eruptions in the Saint Elias Mountains between 1175 and 1390 years ago triggered a series of Athapaskan dispersals in the years thereafter.[41] Whether or not the volcanoes were the cause, we know that ancestors of the Apachean Athapaskans, including the Navajo, migrated southward from the northern boreal forests. These ancestors of the Apacheans almost certainly passed through the northwestern plains during the pedestrian era, but it is not yet possible to identify the archaeological record they may have left.[42] Thus, it is difficult to assess the impact of the early Athapaskans on the history of the northwestern plains. The role of the Sarcee, another group that made the transition from life in the northern boreal forest to life on the northwestern plains, is easier to trace.

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[39] The literature is discussed in Appendix A: "*Dramatis Personae.*"

[40] See John W. Ives, *A Theory of Northern Athapaskan Prehistory* (Boulder, Colorado and Calgary: Westview Press, 1990), Chapter 2, especially 14; Michael K. Foster, "Language and the Culture History of North America," in Ives Goddard, ed., *Languages*, Volume 17 of William G. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996): 74.

[41] Ives, *Theory of Northern Athapaskan Prehistory*, 41-5. Several scholars have presented intriguing evidence that Athapaskan oral traditions tell of the eruptions and the populations movements. See D. Wayne Moodie, A.J.W. Catchpole, and Kerry Abel, "Northern Athapaskan Oral Tradition and the White River Volcano," *Ethnohistory* 39 (1992): 148-71.

Between 1700 and 1750 a group of Athapaskans separated from their Athapaskan kin, the Beaver, near Lesser Slave Lake.[43] Once on the plains, the Sarcee quickly became tied to Algonkian bands. Their earliest associations were with Cree bands, but ultimately they became tied to the Blackfoot. In fact, despite their different languages and history, the Sarcee forged such a close relationship with the Blackfoot bands during the equestrian era that some observers have even categorized them with the Blackfoot and the Atsina in the "Blackfoot Confederacy."

The case of the Sarcee is instructive for, although we cannot explain why bands residing in the boreal forest migrated so quickly to a dramatically different environment where they could have had few kinship connections or why those resident on the plains accepted them so easily, it shows that it was very possible for a new culture to move onto the northwestern plains with little or no resistance from groups already resident there. The Sarcee did earn a reputation as fierce warriors, and Sarcee oral traditions related to Diamond Jenness in the early twentieth century suggest that their arrival on the plains was not entirely peaceful.[44] Still, they found common ground with prior inhabitants very quickly if not immediately, after they arrived on the northwestern plains. Had they failed to do so, they would have been unlikely to have succeeded in maintaining their position there.

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[42] Ives, *Theory of Northern Athapaskan Prehistory*, 48-51.

[43] E. F. Wilson, "Report on the Sarcee Indians," *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (1888): 243; Diamond Jenness, *The Sarcee Indians of Alberta* (Ottawa: Publications of the National Museum of Canada, [1938]. Jenness's report is based on field work completed in 1921.

The Numa

The Sarcee did not, and probably could not simply battle their way onto the northwestern plains, but the Shoshoni evidently did. Nevertheless, although the Shoshoni are often associated with the early equestrian era when they apparently briefly dominated much of the region militarily, the Shoshoni presence on the northwestern plains probably began around the year 1500. Apparently, the Shoshoni were already a formidable military force on the northwestern plains during the pedestrian era, even if they occupied only the southwestern margins of the region. The archaeological evidence of the Highwood Complex (asssumed to represent the Numic spread onto the northwestern plains) emerges on the upper Missouri basin after A.D. 1500. The Numic expansion onto the northwestern plains, like that of the Mortlach people, appears to have been aggressive. Some have argued that the expansion of these people may have been made possible by a broad-based subsistence strategy and a socio-political pattern that emphasized strong military organization.[45] On the plains the richer environment encouraged the development of larger bands. Thus, by the time the Shoshoni acquired horses between 1690 and 1700 they were probably already established in the Missouri Basin.[46] If not immediately, the Shoshoni eventually developed peaceful relations with Siouan hunting bands (Hidatsa/proto-Crow) connected with the Middle Missouri Villages, perhaps because of the mutually beneficial trading links that they could develop.[47] Still the lack of archaeological evidence for the Highwood people north of the Missouri River suggests that the Shoshoni presence north of the Missouri was slight during the pedestrian era.

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[44] Jenness, *The Sarcee Indians of Alberta*, 3.

While the Shoshoni bands on the northwestern plains forged cooperative relations with the Crow, they also had important connections with other Numic speakers outside the region. Moreover, the entire history of the northwestern plains in the early equestrian era cannot be understood without recognizing that by the 1690s the Numic bands were widespread throughout the Great Basin and beyond.

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[45] Demitri B. Shimkin, "Comanche-Shoshone Words of Acculturation, 1786-1848," *Journal of the Steward Anthropological Society* 11 (1980): 198; Demitri B. Shimkin, "Shoshone-Comanche Origins and Migrations," *Proceedings of the Sixth Pacific Science Congress IV* (Berkely, University of California Press, 1940), 17-25; Gary A. Wright, "The Shoshonean Migration Problem," *Plains Anthropologist* 23 (1978): 113-37; David B. Madsen, "Dating Paiute-Shoshoni Expansion in the Great Basin," *American Antiquity* 40 (1975): 82-6; Robert L. Bettinger and Martin A. Baumhoff, "The Numic Spread: Great Basin Cultures in Competition," *American Antiquity* 47 (1982): 485-503; Mark Q. Sutton "Warfare and Expansion: An Ethnohistoric Perspective on the Numic Spread," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8 (1986): 65-82; and Robert L. Bettinger, "How, When, and Why Numic Spread," in David B. Madsen and David Rhode, eds. *Across the West: Human Population Movement and the Expansion of the Numa* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 44-55.

[46] See Sally T. Grieiser in Shlesier *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*. For a dissenting interpretation see Vickers in the same volume.

[47] The peaceful trade relationships also may have encouraged technological borrowing. The Crow appear to have adopted Shoshoni tri-notched points, see Greiser in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 50.

Aspects of the Numic spread have been the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Still, there is general agreement that the Numic-speaking peoples were once limited to southwestern portions of the Great Basin, but that they expanded throughout the Great Basin and beyond before the arrival of Euroamericans. Most agree that the expansion of the Numa into the eastern Great Basin and toward the northwestern plains was relatively late.[48] Scholars disagree about whether the Numic spread should be seen as the aggressive expansion of certain communities or the amalgamation of diverse communities into one linguistic whole. Some archaeologists argue that the Numic peoples had an incrementally broader and higher-yielding food-gathering strategy than their predecessors. In the austere environment of the Great Basin their greater reliance on plant resources, even very small seeds, may have given them the decisive advantage that allowed them to displace earlier residents more reliant on the hunting of game.[49] Others argue that various communities, in symbiotic relationships, gradually became more homogenous and all adopted the Shoshonean language.[50] At any rate, by around 1500 Numic-speaking peoples occupied the northern limits of the Great Basin and the margins of the northwestern plains.[51] At that time, the upper Snake River region supported large bison herds.[52] Other Numic bands were expanding southeast towards the southern Rockies. Thus, by 1600 Numic speaking peoples, exhibiting little linguistic diversity, occupied a great extent of territory from the upper Yellowstone, to the southern Rockies. The Shoshoni bands in the north naturally maintained contacts towards the south. During the early seventeenth century, some of the southernmost Numic bands known as the Comanche, acquired some of the horses that the Spanish had recently brought to New Mexico. This made it likely that the Shoshoni would be the first bands on the northwestern plains to acquire horses.

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[48] See David Madsen and David Rhode, "Where are We?" in Madsen and Rhode, eds. *Across the West*, 214-19. For many years there was a virtual consensus behind the "Lamb model" of the Numic spread which proposed that at about A.D. 1000 the Numa were limited to a small region in and around Death Valley but that between about 1300 and 1500 these peoples spread aggressively throughout the Great Basin and beyond. The theory is named after Sydney M. Lamb's "Linguistic Prehistory in the Great Basin," *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 24 (1958): 95-100. Madsen and Rhode's *Across the West* is dedicated to the "Numic Problem." It shows how far scholars have now strayed from the cozy consensus of the Lamb model.

[49] Bettinger and Baumhoff, "The Numic Spread," 485-503. This theory, however, has not been uncontroversial. See Steven R. Simms, "Comments on Bettinger and Baumhoff's Explanation of the 'Numic Spread' in the Great Basin," *American Antiquity* 48 (1983): 825-30; and Robert L. Bettinger and Martin A. Baumhoff, "Return Rates and Intensity of Resource Use in Numic and Prenumic Adaptive Strategies," *American*

The expansion of the Shoshoni onto the northwestern plains has also been the focus of considerable debate. The historical documents refer to an aggressive people

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Antiquity 48 (1983): 830-4. The controversy appears to have been sparked more by Bettinger and Baumhoff's ill-advised effort to emphasize the differences between the two adaptive strategies, and to describe one as "high-cost" and the other as "low cost," than by poor scholarship. A refined version of the Bettinger-Baumhoff model appears in Robert L. Bettinger, "How, When, and Why Numic Spread," in Madsen and Rhode, *Across the West*, 44-55.

[50] Steadman Upham, "Nomads of the Desert West: A Shifting Continuum in Prehistory," *Journal of World Prehistory* 8 (1994): 113-67; Mary Lou Larson and Marcel Kornfeld, "Betwixt and between the Basin and the Plains: The Limits of the Numic Expansion," in Madsen and Rhode, *Across the West*, 209.

[51] Shimkin, "Shoshone-Comanche Origins and Migrations," 20-1.

[52] Butler in Davis and Wilson, *Bison Procurement*, 106-12.

known as the "Snake" or "gens du serpent" that expanded onto the northwestern plains in the early 1700s." Scholars do not agree on who the "Snake" of the historical documents were. Some have suggested that the term did not refer a specific ethnic group. Some argue that the "Snake" were Siouan speakers. The present study argues that the term *Snake* of the northwestern plains referred to Shoshoni bands.[53] Because this is a controversial interpretation, an extended discussion of the evidence and of alternative interpretations is provided in Appendix II, entitled "*Dramatis Personae.*"

By 1700 the northwestern plains was home to a great diversity of human communities that included Algonkians, Siouans, Athapaskans, Numa, Salishans, and Kutenai. Linguistic evidence suggests that these groups originally entered the Great Plains from every direction. Some of these groups battled their way onto the northwestern plains while others were admitted with little resistance. The behaviour of each of these groups during the equestrian era was influenced by its history and its relationships cultivated during the pedestrian era. Some recent migrants were heavily influenced by ties to communities far beyond the northwestern plains. Each of these communities was necessarily prepared to defend its position there militarily even as it cultivated and maintained cooperative relations with other groups. Each with its unique history and connections faced different challenges and opportunities when the horse arrived among the Numic bands of the Missouri basin near the turn of the eighteenth century.

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[53] This is meant to imply that the term "Snake" was a term used to identify specific Shoshoni bands, not a general term. At the same time we can assume that Shoshoni bands had important connections with other bands.

Chapter Five

The Horse and Gun Revolution, 1700-1770

> Napi went away far South and there saw horses coming out of the water of a big lake. He made a rope of buffalo-hair and ran up behind the horses and caught a little foal which he carried off on his back, the mother and a great number of other colts coming with the colt. He took some of the mares [*sic*] dung and rubbed himself all over with it and the mare at once took kindly to him so that he caught her and brought all those horses up [along with] her and gave them to these Indians who broke them and rode them.
>
> Robert Nathaniel Wilson, 1896[1]

Scholars have long debated the significance of the arrival and spread of horses and guns on the Great Plains. Much of this debate has surrounded the question of whether or not the arrival of the horse triggered fundamental changes in Plains cultures.[2] Scholars have paid much less attention to the effects of horse and gun on Great Plains warfare and diplomacy. Frank Secoy's pioneering study, published in 1953, remains the only general survey of the impact of horse and gun on Plains Native warfare. In contrast to many of his contemporaries, Secoy downplayed the culture as an important factor in Plains Native history. He maintained that absolute necessity induced all Plains communities to adopt, or to attempt to adopt, all successful military techniques and innovations. Their only alternatives were flight or annihilation.[3] More recent work echoes Secoy's findings. Historian, Dan Flores, has described the horse as "the chief catalyst of an ongoing remaking of the tribal map of western America, as native American groups moved onto the Plains and incessantly shifted their ranges and alliances in response to a world where accelerating change seemed almost the only constant."[4] Clark McCauley has observed that "the horse and gun made some people ... into warriors, and other people ... into fearful refugees."[5] The history of the northwestern plains suggests that Flores, Secoy, and McCauley were correct. The horse and the gun, introduced to opposite corners of the Great Plains in the seventeenth century, became military necessities throughout the northwestern plains by 1800.

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[1] GAI, M 4421, Robert Nathaniel Wilson fonds, "The R.N. Wilson Papers," 56.

[2] This debate has deep roots. In 1908 A. L. Kroeber, in "Ethnology of the Gros Ventre," argued that the arrival of the horse revolutionized plains Native cultures. Clark Wissler, in "Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians," disagreed, contending that the horse intensified, but did not revolutionize plains societies. The debate has continued, not only because scholars cannot easily reconstruct pedestrian societies, but also because they cannot necessarily agree on what constitutes change in kind, and what constitutes change in degree. It is in the light of this debate over the influence of the horse that Oscar Lewis's *The Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture*, which directs attention towards the influence of the fur trade, should be understood. In the first in depth study of the effects of the horse on a Plains Native society (1955), John C. Ewers tended to side with Kroeber; see Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*, *passim*; but especially 338.

The arrival of horse and gun revolutionized patterns of human interaction on the northwestern plains between 1700 and 1770. The fortunes of every Native group on the Great Plains quickly became tied to its access to horses and guns. In the southern part of the region, the Shoshoni, who were a minor presence on the northwestern plains before 1700, led an aggressive interethnic coalition of bands that used their privileged access to horses to dominate the region militarily by 1740. About that time, the southern coalition experienced a reversal. Their northern enemies, increasingly well supplied with horses and guns, took the offensive, forcing the southern coalition to begin its retreat. It was a matter of military might. Groups with little access to the instruments of war inevitably melted away before those with secure access. The environmentally favoured tract between the Red Deer River and Missouri River became the contested area between the coalitions.

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[3] Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 94.

[4] Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991): 467.

[5] Clark McCauley, "Conference Overview," in Jonathan Haas, ed., *The Anthropology of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2. Also see Patricia C. Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War," 101-2.

The Arrival and Spread of the Horse

In January of 1598 Juan de Oñate and a party of about 500 Spanish soldiers and clergy, women and children, and over 7000 horses, sheep, and cattle embarked from Mexico City to establish the first Spanish settlements in the valley of the upper Rio Grande.[6] The settlements of New Mexico, which soon came to be centred around the village of Santa Fe near the pueblos, were separated from Mexico by hundreds of unsettled miles. Oñate, a member of a prominent Mexican silver mining family, truly sought a *new* Mexico with incredible mineral riches. Because of the colony's orientation, its isolation, its chronically hostile relations with the Natives of the Plains and Great Basin, and because of the lack of a substantial market for furs in Mexico or Spain, the tiny population of New Mexico came to rely more heavily on stock raising and trade in Native slaves than on the fur trade.[7] A small fur trade did develop in New Mexico, especially at the pueblos, but fearing that any traded guns would merely be turned back on the Spanish empire, trade in guns was prohibited.[8] Still, neighbouring Natives frequently raided the Spanish settlements. Through these raids and trading encounters Natives acquired their first European goods. Far more important, the pueblo dwellers, Apache, and Utes began to acquire horses in the early seventeenth century. The Spanish probably trained Pueblo and Ute slaves in horsemanship very early in the history of New Mexico, and escapees likely brought horse handling expertise to their kin. A hundred and fifty years later horse ownership had spread throughout the Great Plains.[9]

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[6] The most detailed discussion of the founding of New Mexico is found in Marc Simmons, *The Last Conquistador: Juan de Oñate and the Settling of the Far Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). For information on settlers see p. 96. For the horses associated with the expedition see James A. Hanson, "Spain on the Plains," *Nebraska History* 74(1) (1993): 4; Michel Pijoan, "The Herds of Oñate: A Speculation," *El Palacio* 81 (3) (1975): 11. The Spanish introduced their first horses to North America early in the sixteenth century, and it was formerly assumed that horses spread to Indians soon thereafter. See Clark Wissler, "The Influence of the Horse in the Development of Plains Culture," *American Anthropologist* 16 (1914): 1-25. Since the publication of an influential pair of articles by Francis Haines, however, there is a general consensus that the Plains Natives did not acquire horses until they acquired them from New Mexico in the early seventeenth century; Francis Haines, "Where Did the Plains Indians Get Their Horses?" *American Anthropologist* 40 (1938): 112-7, and his "The Northward Spread of Horses Among the Plains Indians," *American Anthropologist* 40 (1938): 429-37.

Usually, a Native group acquired its first horses in friendly trade, since that allowed the transmission of the horses, and the requisite handling expertise. Not surprisingly, those who acquired horses tried to prevent enemies from acquiring any horses at all. They were also reluctant to trade horses to friendly neighbours unless they were satisfied with their own supply. Once possessed of horses and horsemanship,

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[7] David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 77, 90, 196, 434n, 128.

[8] See David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); Alfred B. Thomas, *The Plains Indians and New Mexico, 1751-1778* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1940); and Charles E. Hanson Jr., "The Mexican Traders," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 6 (3)(1970): 2-6.

[9] See Francis Haines *Horses in America*, (New York : Crowell, 1971), 51; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 20-30.

Native communities attempted to augment their herds through breeding, trading, and raiding. The fact that horses initially diffused through peaceful trade meant that the horse spread more spoke-like than wave-like: quickly among peaceful and related groups northward from New Mexico, and more slowly in the crucible of the plains (Figure 5.1).[10] The Apache were the first to use horse ownership to dominate their neighbours.[11] Located near New Mexico in 1600, Apache groups occupied large areas of the western Great Plains a century later.[12] Their dominance, however, was short lived. In the successful "Pueblo Revolt" of 1680, Natives captured many Spanish horses. This sudden influx of horses also spurred the spread of horses among Native groups.[13] Between 1690 and 1700 Numic speakers of the Great Basin acquired their first horses, probably from their linguistic cousins the Utes.[14] They quickly adjusted to equestrian life and a remarkable expansion of these people began.[15] Some of them, whom the Utes would call

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[10] Dennis Lloyd Rinn, "The Acquisition, Diffusion and Distribution of the European Horse Among the Blackfoot Tribes in Western Canada," MA Thesis, University of Manitoba, 22.

[11] Rinn, "The Acquisition, Diffusion and Distribution of the European Horse," 20-1.

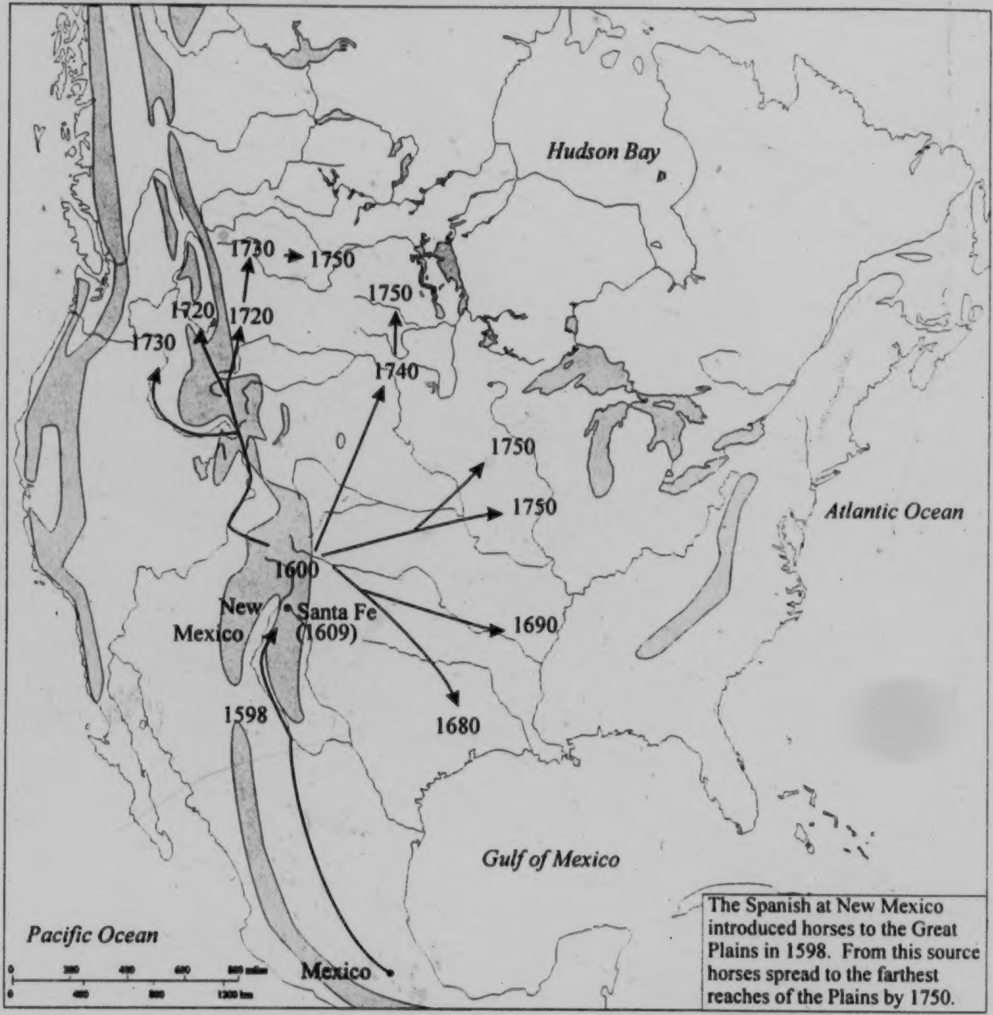
[12] Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 7.

[13] Demitri B. Shimkin, "The Introduction of the Horse," in Warren L. D'Azevedo, ed., *Great Basin*, Vol. 11 of William C. Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 517.

[14] Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 468. Secoy notes that the Utes were on generally friendly terms with the Spanish before the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, *Changing Military Patterns*, 28. Demitri Shimkin presents linguistic evidence for the Ute-Comanche diffusion of the horse in "Comanche-Shoshone Words of Acculturation," 199.

[15] Shimkin, "The Introduction of the Horse," 517; and Sutton, "Warfare and Expansion," 70.

Figure 5.1
The Spread of Horses on the Great Plains, 1598-1750


1730
1750
1750
1720
1720
1730
1740
1750
1750
1600
New Mexico
Santa Fe (1609)
1690
1598
1680
Hudson Bay
Atlantic Ocean
Gulf of Mexico
Pacific Ocean
Mexico

The Spanish at New Mexico introduced horses to the Great Plains in 1598. From this source horses spread to the farthest reaches of the Plains by 1750.

Adapted from Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns* and Doige, "Warfare and Alliance Patterns."

the "Komantica" (Comanche), burst onto the southern plains towards the source of the horses and the bison herds of the region.[16] Apparently unheard of in New Mexico before the eighteenth century, the nomadic Comanche displaced semi-sedentary Apache groups and dominated the plains of eastern New Mexico by the middle of the eighteenth century.[17] At Santa Fe and at Taos after 1759, the Comanche and others continually traded and raided for Spanish goods and horses.[18]

By the 1720s some of the Comanche's Shoshoni kin were already on the northwestern plains. Their expansion into the region may have begun when they were pedestrian hunters, but probably occurred primarily after they acquired horses. Natives typically used horses domestically before they used them militarily, but even when they used their horses only domestically, the Shoshoni must have enjoyed important military advantages over their pedestrian rivals. Because horses permitted the Shoshoni to form large bands, especially in the summer, the Shoshoni could muster larger war parties than their rivals. The Shoshoni bows and arrows were also noticeably more effective than those of their neighbours, in part because of their access to superior wood and lithics.[19] The only historical record regarding "Snake"-Blackfoot warfare of the early equestrian era, and the most detailed historical account of Plains warfare during this era is contained in a fascinating, although occasionally internally contradictory account preserved by David Thompson. Young Man (Saukamappee) recounted his story in 1787, many years after the events occurred. Young Man was born among the Cree of the Lower Saskatchewan in the early 1700s but spent most of his adult life with the Peigan where he became an influential leader. According to Young Man (although David Thompson may have been confused on this), without using horses in battle, the southern bands had forced the Blackfoot to withdraw from the South Saskatchewan River basin toward the Eagle Hills by about the 1730s, leaving the Shoshoni and the Crow or Crow-Hidatsa to dominate the northwestern plains.[20]

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[16] Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 468.

[17] Shimkin, "The Introduction of the Horse," 517; Hanson, "Spain on the Plains," 7; Frederic J. Arthearn, "A Time of Transition: New Mexico in the Eighteenth Century," *Southwestern Lore* 59 (1)(1993): 19. Comanche dominance in the mid-eighteenth century was aided by their access to some guns acquired from French traders on the Missouri just before the Seven Years War, Thomas, *The Plains Indians and New Mexico*, 17-34. Many have argued that the earliest Spanish-Comanche contacts date from 1706 but Thomas Kavanagh has argued convincingly that the Comanche probably did not visit New Mexico before 1719, Thomas W. Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective 1706-1875* (Linclon: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 64-5.

[18] By 1719 the Comanche had already earned a reputation as one of the foremost horse raiding groups in New Mexico, Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 29. They also traded, however, Shimkin, "Comanche-Shoshone Words of Acculturation," 199. For a discussion of Comanche trade at Taos and Spanish-Comanche hostility, see Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 63-132.

In their distress, Blackfoot bands turned to their Cree and Assiniboine neighbours. According to Young Man, "the Peeagans were always the frontier Tribe, and upon whom the Snake Indians made their attacks, these latter were very numerous, even without their allies; and the Peeagans had to send messengers among us [Cree bands of the lower Saskatchewan] to procure help."[21] By that time, when Young Man was a boy of about sixteen years, the Blackfoot already knew about European goods, but possessed very few, if any, of them. Even this Cree band had only a few guns, and when they joined the Peigan in battle they did not take them along:

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[19] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 329.

[20] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 328.

[21] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 328.

> There were a few guns amongst us, but very little ammunition, and they were left to hunt for the families; Our weapons was a Lance, mostly pointed with iron, some few of stone, A Bow and a quiver of Arrows; the Bows were of Larch, the length came to the chin; the quiver had about fifty arrows, of which ten had iron points, the others were headed with stone. My [Young Man's] father carried his knife on his breast and his axe in his belt. Such was my father's weapons, and those with him had much the same weapons. I had a Bow and Arrows and a knife, of which I was very proud. We came to the Peeagan and their allies. They were camped in the plains on the left bank of the River (the north side) and were a great many. We were feasted, a great War Tent was made, and a few days passed in speeches, feasting and dances. A war chief was elected by the chiefs, and we got ready to march. Our spies had been out and had seen a large camp of the Snake Indians on the Plains of the Eagle Hill, and we had to cross the River in canoes, and on rafts, which we carefully secured for our retreat. When we had crossed and numbered our men, we were about 350 warriors ... they had their scouts out, and came to meet us. Both parties made a great show of their numbers, and I thought that they were more numerous than ourselves.
>
> After some singing and dancing, they sat down on the ground, and placed their large shields before them, which covered them: We did the same, but our shields were not so many, and some of our shields had to shelter two men. Theirs were all placed touching each other; their Bows were not so long as ours, but of better wood, and the back covered with the sinews of the Bisons which made them very elastic, and their arrows went a long way and whizzed about us as balls do from guns. They were all headed with a sharp smooth, black stone (flint) which broke when it struck anything. Our iron headed arrows did not go through their shields but stuck in them; On both sides several were wounded, but none lay on the ground; and night put an end to the battle, without a scalp being taken on either side, and in those days such was the result, unless one party was more numerous than the other. The great mischief of war then, was as now, by attacking and destroying small camps of ten to thirty tents, which are obliged to separate for hunting.[22]

If the Shoshoni had horses at the time, they did not use them in battle. Soon afterwards however, the proliferation of horses among the Shoshoni made them the dominant military force on the northwestern plains. The kin connections between Comanche and Shoshoni, the fact that the Great Basin was less affected than the Plains by warfare, and the existence of the Shoshoni trade rendezvous in the upper Green River basin, made the region a channel for horse ownership. Shoshoni bands quickly accumulated sufficiently large horse herds to begin trading them with Crow, Nez Perce, and Flathead bands by the 1730s, perhaps at the Shoshoni rendezvous. Soon the Kutenai too had horses.[23]

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[22] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 328-30.

Soon too, the Shoshoni began using horses in battle, leaving all their enemies reeling. On the northwestern plains the Shoshoni drove the pedestrian Blackfoot towards the North Saskatchewan River. Young Man's description hints at the effect that the sight of horse-mounted warriors had on the enemies of the Shoshoni:

> the Snake Indians and their allies had Misstutim (Big Dogs, that is Horses) on which they rode, swift as the Deer, on which they dashed at the Peeagans, and with their stone Pukamoggan knocked them on the head, and they had thus lost several of their best men. This news we did not well comprehend and it alarmed us, for we had no idea of Horses and could not make out what they were.[24]

Native rock art preserves a record of the equestrian revolution (Figure 5.2). While the Blackfoot continued to hunt in a broad contested zone, they always did so at the risk of Shoshoni attack, especially during the summers when small pedestrian hunting parties were no match for the large mobile mounted war parties. The Cree bands of the lower Saskatchewan learned of horses from the hard-pressed Blackfoot bands. The dramatic military advantage that horses gave the Shoshoni encouraged their aggression. In 1742

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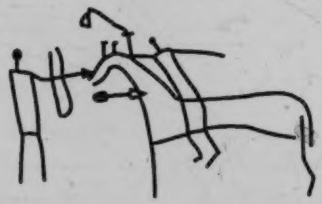
[23] Salish traditions preserved by James A. Teit point to the Shoshoni as the source of the horse herds of the Columbia plateau peoples, Teit, "Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus," 346-7.

[24] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 330.

Figure 5.2
Petroglyph Showing a Pedestrian and Equestrian Warrior in Confrontation



A lightly armed pedestrian warrior meets an equestrian warrior in this petroglyph from Writing-On-Stone near the Sweetgrass Hills. Evidently, the glyph commemorates an instance where the pedestrian warrior was victorious over the equestrian warrior. Redrawn from Keyser, "Writing-On-Stone," 68.

Cheyenne informants told Louis-Joseph Gaultier de La Vérendrye that the Shoshoni

> do not content themselves in a campaign with destroying a village, according to the customs of all the savages; they keep up the war from spring to autumn. They are very numerous, and woe to those who cross their path! They are not friendly with any tribe. It is said that in 1741 they had entirely ruined seventeen villages, killed all the men and the old women, made slaves of the young women and sold them on the coast for horses and merchandise.[25]

Contrary to the Cheyenne's (or La Vérendrye's) assertion, the relations between the Crow and Shoshoni may have been generally peaceful during this era. The acquisition of horses appears to have led Crow bands to gravitate towards the excellent horse pasture of the Yellowstone basin, and this may well have caused friction with some Shoshoni bands, but it seems that Shoshoni bands continued to value Crow trade contacts with the Missouri villagers. Indeed, with the addition of the horse both as a mode of transportation and as a exchange item, trade relations between the Crow and the Missouri villagers now grew in importance.[26] The Shoshoni maintained their access to the goods of the Missouri villages through Crow intermediaries.[27]

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[25] Lawrence J. Burpee, *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varrennes de la Vérendrye and His Sons* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1927), 412. Burpee did not assume these "Gens du Serpent" were the Shoshoni, but Demitri Shimkin has stated that they "unquestionably" were, Shimkin, "Comanche-Shoshoni Words of Acculturation," 201.

The arrival of the horse and increased trade contact between the Crow and Hidatsa, perhaps in concert with factors internal to the Hidatsa (factionalism or population pressure), may have encouraged new waves of Hidatsa migration to the northwestern plains. This was the period when migrants from the Middle Missouri Villages built and briefly occupied mud houses in the upper Missouri River basin and the South Saskatchewan River basin. The evidence that at least some of these villagers owned horses and a few metal tools suggests that the villages were settled, but soon abandoned, during the very early equestrian era.[28] The Crow or Hidatsa who lived in the villages probably found that a semi-sedentary lifestyle did not suit an equestrian people overwhelmingly dependent on the bison. Nevertheless, the fact that these people settled as far north as the Bow River suggests that the bands of the southern coalition felt secure in that area in the early pedestrian era.

During the early eighteenth century the equestrian Shoshoni and Crow bands enjoyed such military advantages over their enemies that they dominated the northwestern plains. Flathead and Kutenai bands friendly with the Shoshoni also occupied the western margins of the plains.[29] For their safety, Blackfoot and Atsina bands were forced to retreat to the North Saskatchewan River region, although their hunting parties made forays farther south.[30] Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the fortunes of the Shoshoni turned. The Shoshoni were incapable of preventing spread of horses to the Blackfoot and Atsina. Blackfoot groups, probably the Peigan, likely acquired their first horses from Flathead or Kutenai bands in the 1730s.[31] The Peigan, in turn would have shared their horses with their Blood and Siksika kin soon thereafter. Horses first arrived at the Mandan/Hidatsa villages around 1740 probably in the company of Crow or Cheyenne traders.[32] From this trading centre, and from the Blackfoot, various

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[26] Hoxie, *Parading Through History*, 43; Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870," 353.

[27] Archaeologists have found tri-notched obsidian points (assumed to be acquired from the Shoshoni), in sites containing "Mandan tradition" pottery (assumed to be Crow sites). This suggests a considerable Crow-Shoshoni trading relationship probably not restricted to these items. See Greiser in Schlesier, ed. *Plains Indians, A. D. 500-1500*, 50. Young Man's account testifies to the "allies" of the Snake, Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 328 (quoted above).

[28] Mulloy, *The Hagan Site*; Forbis, *Cluny*; Hoxie, *Parading Through History*, 39; Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 25.

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[29] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 522.

[30] There are no direct references to the Atsina in the fur trade documents until the 1770s. Matthew Cocking's reference to them in 1772, however, makes it clear that the "Powestick Athinnewock or Water-fall Indians" were normally grouped together with the three Blackfoot groups when Cree bands referred to the "four Nations ... which go under the name of Yeachithinnee Indians with whom they are in friendship," HBCA B.239/a/69, 1 December 1772. It is on this basis that one can make tentative conclusions about Atsina history during this period.

[31] Rinn, "The Acquisition, Diffusion and Distribution of the European Horse," 65-66; and Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri*, 12-13, argue that it was impossible that the Blackfoot would have acquired their horses from the Shoshoni. It is less likely that they got them from the Shoshoni than the Flathead, but it was not impossible for such an exchange to have taken place between particular Shoshoni and Peigan bands that had agreed to a peace.

[32] See Burpee, *Journals and Letters*, which shows that Vérendrye saw no horses at the Mandan villages as late as early 1739 but his sons came back with two horses from the Mandan villages in 1741.

Cree and Assiniboine bands began acquiring their first horses. By the 1750s Cree and Assiniboine bands on the northeastern plains were probably among the last groups on the Great Plains to acquire horses.[33]

The tide turned against the Shoshoni and Crow bands, not only because the Blackfoot acquired horses, but also because they were simultaneously acquiring European weaponry. Blackfoot horse herds remained smaller than Shoshoni and Crow herds but access to metal and to European weaponry allowed the Blackfoot bands to stay the Shoshoni expansion. The military importance of metal and guns induced the Blackfoot bands in the eighteenth century to cultivate friendly relations with Cree and Assiniboine suppliers. Thus, Cree and Assiniboine bands that visited Euroamerican fur traders forged symbiotic relationships with Blackfoot and Atsina bands on the northwestern plains. The Blackfoot and Atsina depended on the Cree and Assiniboine for access to European goods while the Cree and Assiniboine relied on the Blackfoot for their horses.

The Arrival and Spread of European Weaponry

With the establishment of a seasonal HBC trading settlement at the mouth of the Nelson River in the 1670s and the establishment of York Factory in 1684, European goods began to find their way inland via Native trade networks. The British and French traders were always alert to the possibility of precious metals being found in America's interior but unlike the Spanish, the British and French came to the region primarily to trade the furs that the Natives were eager to supply in exchange for a wide variety of European goods, including weaponry (Figure 5.3). Immediately, then, peaceful trading relations were developed between Euroamericans and Natives on the Hudson's Bay.

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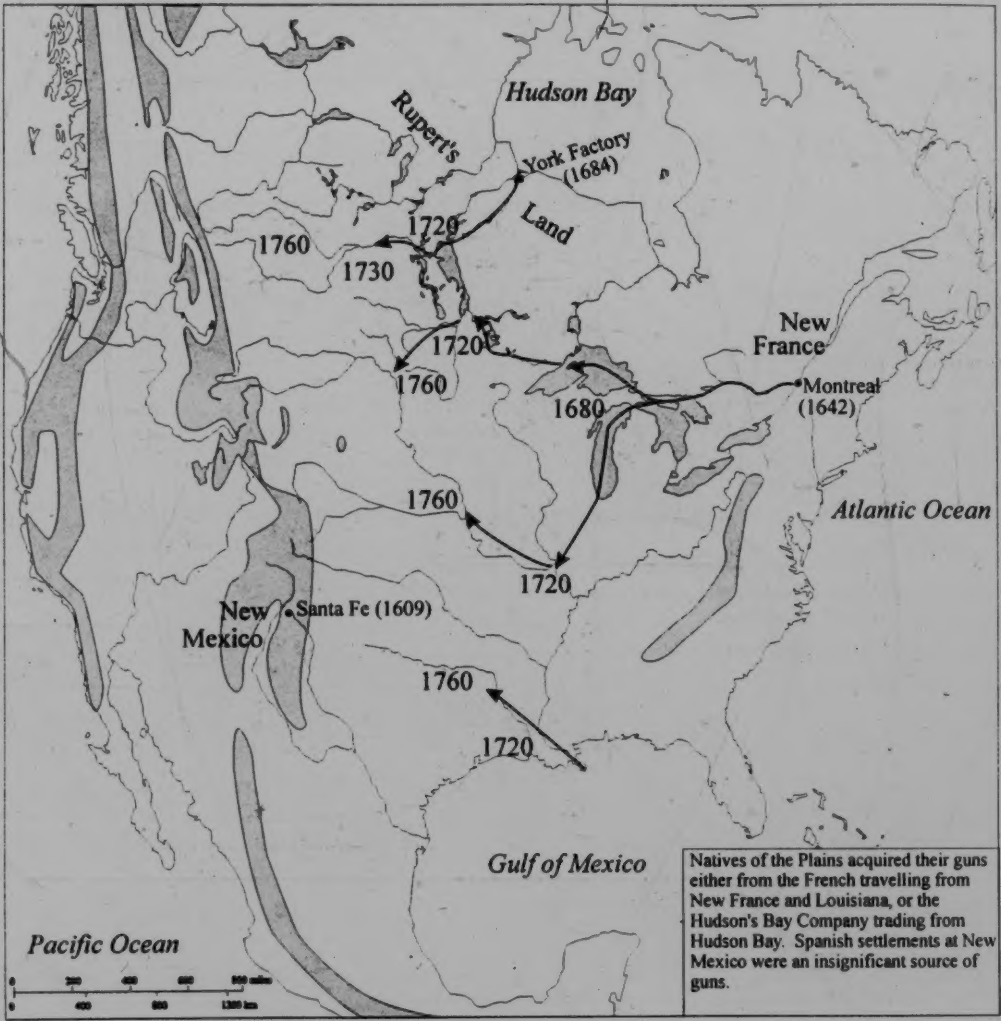
[33] When Anthony Henday visited the northern plains in 1754 the Blackfoot were fully equestrian, and the Cree and Assiniboine on the plains had already acquired some horses. William Pink found a "Great Many horses" among the Assiniboine in 1767, HBCA B.239/a/56, 22 January 1767.

It is impossible to know precisely when various European goods reached the northwestern plains. The mobility of hunting and gathering bands made it possible for European goods to reach the Blackfoot within a few years. It is unlikely, however, that this occurred. Natives of the northwestern plains may have acquired some European goods before 1720, but they may not have acquired them in significant quantity until the 1730s.

For the first years after the establishment of trading posts on the shores of the Hudson Bay, Native groups near the Bay probably absorbed most of the supply of European goods. Since many of these goods were consumed (tobacco, liquor, powder, and shot), worn out (kettles), or broken (guns) quickly, these same groups continued to absorb some of the supply. Until the 1730s, when traders from New France travelled into the region, the interior trade was handled solely by Native traders who had very limited means or incentive to convey goods beyond their necessities. There certainly was no opportunity or incentive for individuals or bands to specialize as traders. Instead Cree and Assiniboine hunters acquired European goods for their own use at York Factory in one summer and, shortly before returning to York Factory the following spring, traded these used goods with other groups who did not make the trip to the Bay. This method of trade limited the distribution of European goods, particularly those goods, like tobacco,

Figure 5.3
The Spread of Guns on the Great Plains to 1760


Hudson Bay
Rupert's Land
York Factory (1684)
1720
1760
1730
1720
1760
New France
Montreal (1642)
1680
1760
1720
Atlantic Ocean
New Mexico
Santa Fe (1609)
1760
1720
Gulf of Mexico
Pacific Ocean

Natives of the Plains acquired their guns either from the French travelling from New France and Louisiana, or the Hudson's Bay Company trading from Hudson Bay. Spanish settlements at New Mexico were an insignificant source of guns.

Adapted from Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns.*

liquor, powder, and shot, that were either exhausted or in short supply by spring.[34]

The uncertainty of supply also slowed the diffusion of goods before 1717. Unlike the supply of horses, which once in the hands of Natives could increase by natural reproduction, the supply of European goods required constant replenishment from its source. The influx of European goods did generally become larger and more certain over the years, but trading Indians soon learned that this flow could be, and was, disrupted on occasion. Unless they were reasonably certain of being able to replenish their supply of European goods when they arrived at fur trade posts, Native traders would want to retain a part of their own supply. This was an important consideration in the early years.[35]

The Natives of the northwestern plains could not have known about the geopolitical forces that influenced the availability of European goods in the region, but they were very much affected by them. The establishment of York Factory coincided roughly with the end of a period of relative peace between the English and French crowns. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 ushered in seventy-five years of war and rivalry. France's Louis XIV would not allow the Protestant William and Mary to control the crown of England without a struggle. As part of the War of the League of Augsburg, French forces captured York Factory in October 1694 and renamed it Fort Bourbon. The

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[34] Fragments of metal, useful for arrow heads, were probably distributed more widely. Still, Young Man's band, resident on the lower Saskatchwan River, still used some stone arrowheads in the 1730s. See Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 328 (quoted above).

[35] See Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 54 for a map showing the approximate distribution of European goods by 1720. It suggests that the hinterland of York Factory may have reached the northeastern part of the northwestern plains by 1720.

Treaty of Ryswick (1697) that ended that war called for the return of Hudson's Bay Company posts but the French held Fort Bourbon until September 1714 when they finally relinquished it in accordance with the Treaty of Utrecht that ended the War of the Spanish Succession.[36] Operated by the French Companie du Nord, Fort Bourbon was poorly supplied with European goods.[37] For example, the manager of the fort noted that the fort was not resupplied at all between 1708 and 1713. This left the local Cree "in a bad way," and even the traders themselves without "enough food or powder to hunt game with guns."[38] Naturally, inland groups that had travelled considerable distances to get to the Bay stopped visiting in those years. Thirty canoes of "Mountain Indians" (probably connected to the Mandan/Hidatsa villages) visited York Factory after its restoration to the HBC in 1716 and told James Knight that they had not come to the Bay for fifteen or sixteen years for fear of finding that the French would have no supplies for them.[39] The return of the HBC to York Factory induced some inland Natives to resume travelling to the Bay.[40] Unfortunately, the early years following the return of the HBC were also plagued by supply problems. In 1716, for example, the HBC supply ship did not arrive at York Factory. The supply problems were not mere inconvenience for the Indians who travelled to the Bay. Their families that were left inland were vulnerable to starvation and to attack by enemies. The Indian traders themselves incurred the risks of travelling several weeks through a harsh environment to get to the Factory and back. If they arrived to find no supplies, they were forced to abandon the furs that they had gathered only to return to their families empty-handed. Those who came to the Factory on these occasions had every reason to exaggerate their difficulties when later speaking to traders, but their complaints hint at the difficulties they endured. One leading inland Indian told James Knight in 1717 that because the supply ship had not arrived the previous year "he has Lost allmost all his Family and weeps very much & Said that A great Many Indians they have heard nothing of yet wch he fears is Lost Winter Comeing on upon them before they could gett into their own Country."[41] The Mountain Indians explained how they had sealed a peace agreement by giving to their enemies guns, powder, shot, knives, and hatchets, and were now faced with returning with no goods, and now expected that their neigbours "may break out a Warr again wth 'em & kill 'em with their own weapons."[42] Exaggerated or not, these accounts clearly explain why the inland Indians were reluctant to travel to the Bay until they were reasonably certain of being able to acquire supplies once they got there. For example, only about a third of the inland Indians that came to

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[36] R. Douglas and J.N. Wallace, eds., *Twenty Years of York Factory, 1694-1714: Jérémie's Account of Hudson Strait and Bay* (Ottawa: Thorburn and Abbott, 1926), 9. The British held the fort from September 1696 to September 1697.

[37] Douglas and Wallace, eds., *Twenty Years of York Factory*, 38, 40, 42; HBCA B.239/a/3 11 June 1717.

[38] Douglas and Wallace, eds., *Twenty Years of York Factory*, 40, 38.

[39] HBCA, B.239/a/2, 15 June 1716. Ray argues that the Mountain Indians were tied to the Mandan-Hidatsa villages, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55-7. Russell's argument that these would be Cree from Riding Mountain is less convincing. See Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 133-6.

[40] HBCA B.239/a/3, 11 June 1717.

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[41] HBCA B.239/a/3, 28 May 1717. Also see 25 June 1717.

[42] HBCA B.239/a/2, 18 June 1716; B.239/a/3, 11 March 1717.

York Factory in 1716 came back in 1717.[43] These accounts also suggest why, particularly before the 1720s, those who did travel to the Bay were hesitant to supply "strangers" with European manufactures. Probably then, the flow of European goods to the northwestern plains was slight before 1720, and was limited largely to metal utensils and tools.

After the French gave up Fort Bourbon in 1714 they lost all access to the western interior via the Hudson's Bay. This forced them to resume competing with the British traders at the Bay by plying the waters of the Great Lakes. Although the French had occupied sites as far west as Kaministiquia (present-day Thunder Bay) in the late 1670s and early 1680s, Louis XIV had ordered that they be abandoned in the 1690s after the French captured HBC posts on Hudson Bay, and as fur prices plummeted because of a glut in the European market.[44] In 1714 the discovery that the surplus beaver furs in French warehouses had spoiled, and the loss of Hudson Bay posts spurred a return to these sites and an expansion beyond them.[45] By the late 1720s the French were beginning to trade goods in the region south of York Factory (Figure 5.4).[46] These traders were not trading on the plains themselves but apparently their activities encouraged the diffusion of European goods onto the plains. A few of these French men left the service and were

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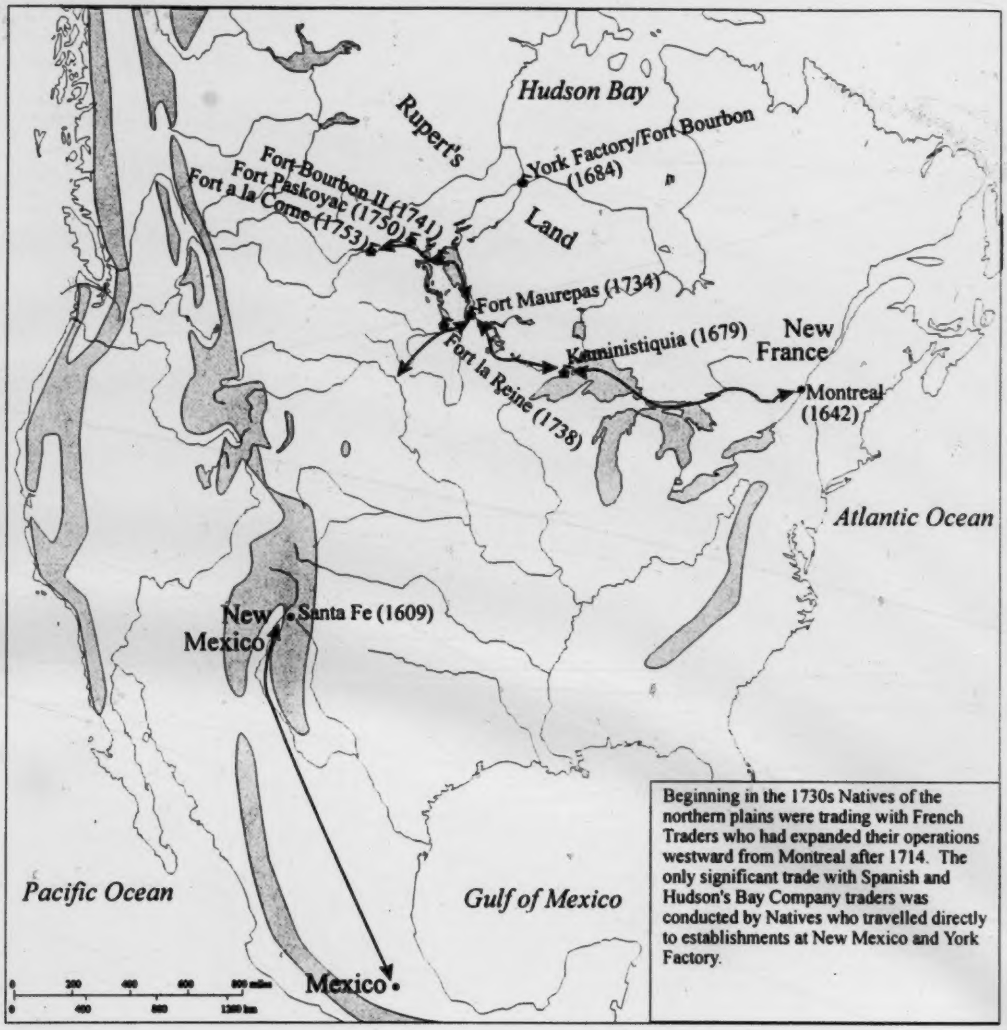
[43] HBCA B.239/a/3, 10 June 1717.

[44] See Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 49-51. For the glut, see W.J. Eccles. *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 125-6.

[45] Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier,* 145.

[46] The French are mentioned in HBCA B.239/a/11, 12 June 1729. See Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 91-2.

Figure 5.4
Euroamerican Trading Centres and Transportation Routes to 1760


Hudson Bay
Rupert's Land
York Factory/Fort Bourbon (1684)
Fort Bourbon II (1741)
Fort Paskoyac (1750)
Fort a la Corne (1753)
Fort Maurepas (1734)
Fort la Reine (1738)
Kaministiquia (1679)
New France
Montreal (1642)
Atlantic Ocean
New Mexico
Santa Fe (1609)
Pacific Ocean
Gulf of Mexico
Mexico
0 200 400 600 800 miles
0 400 800 1200 km

Beginning in the 1730s Natives of the northern plains were trading with French Traders who had expanded their operations westward from Montreal after 1714. The only significant trade with Spanish and Hudson's Bay Company traders was conducted by Natives who travelled directly to establishments at New Mexico and York Factory.

adopted by Native bands. The Blackfoot probably met some of these men.[47] Furthermore, "Kis.ska.che.wan" Cree began arriving at York Factory in the 1730s.[48] These Cree bands from the Saskatchewan River valley were probably neighbours of Blackfoot and the Atsina bands near the Eagle Hills. It was in company with one of these Cree bands that a party of "Bloody Indians (or Mithcoo Ethenue)" came to York Factory in 1733.[49]

On 4 June 1735 various Indians, including some Kis.ska.che.wan and Sturgeon Cree (probably from the lower Saskatchewan River region) confirmed a rumour brought to York Factory during the winter "of the french having fixd a Settlement on this Side ye Little Sea & that there was 10 Cannoes came to it this Summer, with trading goods & other necessaries."[50] This may be a reference to Fort Maurepas at the southern end of Lake Winnipeg established in the summer of 1734 by Pierre Gaultier de Varrennes et de la Vérendrye at the insistence of Cree and Assiniboine bands, although it could be a reference to an outpost established on the northern end of the Lake by Gaultier's party or by other French men.[51] In subsequent years the company heard more news of the advance of the French traders in York Factory's hinterland. Sioux resistance to the spread of the French trade slowed French expansion in the late 1730s but by 1741 the French had answered calls by certain Cree bands to establish a fort "at the entrance to the great English river" by establishing a new Fort Bourbon at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River.[52] During the War of the Austrian Succession (1744-48) a British blockade cut off supplies to the French traders, but thereafter expansion was renewed; by 1753 Fort á la Corne was established as an outpost of Fort Poskoyac just downstream from the confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers at a major Cree aggregation centre known as Pehonan.[53] The French dealt primarily in goods of high cost in relation to bulk. Their fur trade establishments were not substantial buildings; Anthony Henday described the "hogstye" that was Fort Poskoyac (at the Pas) as a 26 by 12 foot log structure, with a birchbark roof.[54] Still, the French were obviously effective in capturing a significant portion of the trade that might otherwise have gone to York Factory. The value of furs traded at York Factory reached its all-time high in the late 1720s, after which it began declining.[55] These posts also increased the flow of European goods to the northwestern plains. Cree and Assiniboine bands traded at these posts directly, and some of them conveyed goods west to the northwestern plains where they traded them with Blackfoot, Atsina, and other Cree and Assiniboine. The Blood and other "Earchethinue" who the HBC so eagerly wanted to see at York Factory naturally ceased visiting York Factory. It is probable, although impossible to prove, that Cree bands guided some Blackfoot to the French posts during these years. Undoubtedly Blackfoot and Atsina bands acquired valuable European products, including guns and ammunition indirectly through their Cree and Assiniboine trading partners in these years. A number of Cree leaders, among them White Bird (Wapinesiw) and Little Deer (Attickasish) emerged as important figures in the relationship with the Blackfoot groups.[56] It would be misleading to suggest a general Cree-Blackfoot alliance at this time, for such a generalization neglects the social reality. There were hostile encounters between Cree and Assiniboine bands and Archithinue bands in the 1750s and 1760s.[57] These hostilities were likely related to the earliest Cree and Assiniboine horse raids against the Blackfoot — horse raids destined to become the major irritant in Cree and Assiniboine relations with their neighbours in the years to come. Relations between the Cree and Assiniboine and the Blackfoot were generally friendly in these years and some bands of Cree and Assiniboine were allied with Blackfoot bands. These alliances were strengthened by the mutually beneficial trading relationship but also by mutual fear of the Shoshoni.[58] White Bird and Little Deer had established cordial relations with the Blackfoot by the 1740s if not earlier.[59] Their relationship carried forward the pattern followed earlier by Young Man's father. Their relationship with the Blackfoot would not have been restricted to trade. Both White Bird and Little Deer, for example, joined winter-time Blackfoot raids against the Snake.[60] Intermarriage between bands would have taken place as it did in Young Man's case in the 1730s. The cordial relations also allowed certain Cree bands to hunt in the upper North Saskatchewan River basin, including in the Beaver Hills.[61]

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[47] HBCA B.239/a/23, 4 June 1742 mentions a "Kenedy Corne" who visited York Factory in company of Saskatchewan Indians in 1742 after living with the Indians for fourteen years. The Blackfoot word for Euroamericans, *Napikwan*, applies most accurately to French speakers, suggesting that the first Euroamericans the Blackfoot met were French.

[48] The "Shusuanna" are mentioned in B.239/a/13/ 24 June 1730; and the "Kis.ska.che.wan" in B.239/a/17, 31 May 1735.

[49] James Isham (York Factory) to Ferdinand Jacobs (Fort Churchill), 17 July 1758, York Factory Correspondence Books, HBCA B.239/b/16, as quoted in Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55. Without explanation Oscar Lewis estimated that the Blackfoot got their first guns in about 1728, *Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture*, 16.

[50] HBCA B.239/a/17, 4 June 1735.

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[51] Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 92.

[52] Burpee, *Journals and Letters*, 250.

[53] David Meyer and Paul C. Thistle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity in a Cree Social Geography," *Ethnohistory* 42 (1995), 418.

[54] Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 352. The fort is described as a "hogstye" in HBCA B.239/a/40, 22 July 1754.

[55] Ray and Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure,"* 34.

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[56] See Arthur J. Ray, "Wapinesiw," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966-), 4: 761. The translation of Attickasish's name is found in Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 326.

[57] Burpee, *Journals and Letters*, 34; HBCA B.239/a/58, 3 May 1768 and 13 May 1768.

The increasing flow of European goods to the northwestern plains after 1730 had a dramatic impact on the fortunes of bands in the region. Blackfoot-Shoshoni hostilities were longstanding but between 1730 and 1750 the tide turned against the Shoshoni. When the sixteen year old Young Man had grown to be an adult and had spent a winter with his young wife, "Messengers came from our allies to claim assistance."[62] By that time the Cree of the lower Saskatchewan "had more guns and iron headed arrows than before," but the Blackfoot were hard pressed by mounted Shoshoni warriors.[63] Young Man's description of the ensuing events reveals the tremendous impact that guns had on the Shoshoni:

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[58] HBCA B.239/a/69, 16 December 1772.

[59] In 1754 Little Deer was described as having "Lived Long with the Earchithinues," HBCA, B.239/a/36, 26 June 1754; Henday met White Bird in the Red Deer River valley in 1755, Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 346.

[60] HBCA B.239/a/63, 1 April 1770 (where the Snake are identified as the "Kee,ne,pick,e,thin,a,wock.") Matthew Cocking's journal confirms that "Kanapickathinuwock" is the Cree name for the "Snake," HBCA B.239/a/69, 1 December 1772. Also see Russell, *Eighteenth Century Western Cree*, 95. In HBCA B.239/a/56, 30 April 1767 William Pink mentions Cree men going to war against "Ye,arch,a,thin,a,wooke" who were almost certainly not Blackfoot. Again, Matthew Cocking's journal confirms that the "Snake," could "also go under the general name of Yearchithinnee," HBCA B.239/a/69, 1 December 1772.

[61] The cordial relations between Cree and Blackfoot bands are also discussed in Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 6.

> Only three of us went and I should not have gone, had not my wife's relations frequently intimated, that her father's medicine bag would be honoured by the scalp of a Snake Indian. When we came to our allies, the great War Tent [was made] with speeches, feasting and dances as before; and when the War Chief had viewed us all it was found between us and the Stone Indians we had ten guns and each of us about thirty balls, and the powder for the war, and we were considered the strength of the battle. After a few days march our scouts brought us word that the enemy was near in a large war party, but had no Horses with them, for at that time they had very few of them. When we came to meet each other, as usual, each displayed their numbers, weapons and shiel[d]s, in all which they were superior to us, except our guns which were not shown, but kept in their leathern cases, and if we had shown [them], they would have taken them for long clubs. For a long time they held us in suspense; a tall Chief was forming a strong party to make an attack on our centre, and the others to enter into combat with those opposite to them; We prepared for the battle the best we could. Those of us who had guns stood in the front line, and each of us [had] two balls in his mouth, and a load of powder in his left hand to reload.
>
> We noticed they had a great many short stone clubs for close combat, which is a dangerous weapon, and had they made a bold attack on us, we must have been defeated as they were more numerous and better armed than we were, for we could have fired our guns no more than twice; and were at a loss what to do on the wide plains, and each Chief encouraged his men to stand firm. Our eyes were all on the tall Chief and his motions, which appeared to be contrary to the advice of several old Chiefs, all this time were about the strong flight of an arrow from each other. At length the tall chief retired and they formed their long usual line by placing their shields on the ground to touch each other, the shield having a breadth of full three feet or more. We sat down opposite to them and most of us waited for the night to make a hasty retreat. The War Chief was close to us, anxious to see the effect of our guns. The lines were too far asunder to us to make

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[62] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 330.

[63] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 330.

> a sure shot, and we requested him to close the line to about sixty yards, which was gradually done, and lying flat on the ground behind the shields, we watched our opportunity when they drew their bows to shoot at us, their bodies were then exposed and each of us, as opportunity offered, fired with deadly aim, and either killed, or severely wounded, every one we aimed at.
>
> The War Chief was highly pleased, and the Snake Indians finding so many killed and wounded kept themselves behind their shields; the War Chief then desired we would spread ourselves by two's throughout the line, which we did, and our shots caused consternation and dismay along their whole line. The battle had begun about Noon, and the Sun was not yet half down, when we perceive some of them had crawled away from their shields, and were taking to flight. The War Chief seeing this went along the line and spoke to every Chief to keep his Men ready for a charge of the whole line of the enemy, of which he would give the signal; this was done by himself stepping in front with his Spear, and calling on them to follow him as he rushed to their line, and in an instant the whole of us followed him, the great part of the enemy took to flight, but some fought bravely and we lost more than ten killed and many wounded; Part of us pursued, and killed a few, but the chase had soon to be given over, for at the body of every Snake Indian killed, there were five of six of us trying to get his scalp, or part of his clothing, his weapons, or something as a trophy of battle.[64]

Young Man made it clear that the Shoshoni could have won the battle despite their lack of guns. Nevertheless, he also believed that that battle was the turning point in the Blackfoot-Shoshoni warfare in the eighteenth century because of the psychological impact of firearms:

> The terror of that battle and of our guns has prevented any more general battles, and our wars have since been carried by ambuscade and surprize, of small camps, in which we have greatly the advantage, from the Guns, arrow shods of iron, long knives, flat bayonets and axes from the Traders. While we have these weapons, the Snake Indians have none, but what few they sometimes take from one of our small camps which they have destroyed, and they have no Traders among them. We thus continued to advance through the fine plains to the Stag [Red Deer] River.[65]

Some of the drawings etched into the rock commemorate battles such as the one described by Young Man (Figure 5.5).

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[64] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 330-2.

[65] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 335-6.

The ease with which one Native group could augment their horse herds by raiding another's horse herds did nothing to encourage cordial relations between horse-rich and horse-poor groups. On the other hand, constant and reliable access to European goods could only be maintained if a group had direct or indirect access to European suppliers. For the Blackfoot between 1730 and 1780 this meant that cordial relations with Cree and Assiniboine suppliers were absolutely essential. The Shoshoni had only the most tenuous trade connections. Occasional guns (almost inevitably with no ammunition) were found among the Crow and Shoshoni after the guns had travelled west from the Mandan/Hidatsa villages, or even less frequently, from New Mexico, but these were nearly irrelevant militarily. In 1770 the Shoshoni first used guns in battle with their northern enemies. White Bird, however, reported that they "cannot shote well yet," and that the Shoshoni had managed to kill only one Cree warrior at the expense of eighty of their own warriors.[66] Between the 1740s and the 1780s the Blackfoot bands and their allies replaced the Shoshoni and their allies as the dominant military force on the northwestern plains.

On 14 October 1754 scouts from a large Archithinue camp near the Red Deer River approached a party of Keschachewan and Pegogoma Cree led by Little Deer.[67]

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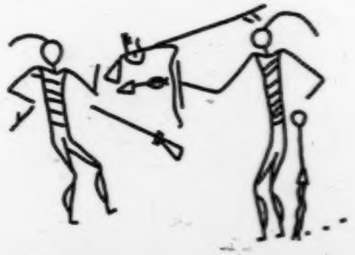
[66] HBCA B.239/a/63, 1 April 1770.

[67] There has been some debate as to whether these Archithinue were Atsina or one of the Blackfoot groups. It would have been truly remarkable, however, if a camp as large as 322 tents did not include members of several groups. It is likely, then, that various members of the Blackfoot groups, as well as the Atsina met Henday on 14 October 1754, and almost inevitable that members of the Blackfoot and Atsina met him over the ensuing

Figure 5.5
Petroglyph Depicting Combat in the Era of European Weaponry



In this petrogyph the warrior on the right appears to have killed the enemy with his bow and arrow. He carries a coup stick in his left arm. Rock art often depicts warriors who were victorious despite facing better-armed foes. The original glyph is at Castle Butte near the Yellowstone River in Yellowstone County, Montana. Stuart Conner estimated that it dates from the 1740s. Redrawn from Conner and Conner, *Rock Art of the Montana High Plains*, Figure 14.

Among them were Anthony Henday, representative of "The Great Leader who lives down at the great waters," and Connawappa, a York Factory Cree leader.[68] Henday had been sent by the HBC "to ye Eachithnue, in order to bring to trade next summer."[69] From 14 to 17 October 1754, as the Archithinue camp grew from 200 to 322 tents (probably at

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months. In the version of the journals found in HBCA B.239/a/40 Henday specifically mentions meeting "bloody Indians" on 16 May 1755.

[68] The label "Pegogoma" (muddy water) suggests at once that these Cree lived near the "Muddy Water River" (South Saskatchewan River) and the "Muddy Water Indians" (Peigan), Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 142-3. Curiously the HBC traders would later assume that the "Muddy Waters" were the Missouri River.

[69] HBCA B.239/a/36, 22 June 1754, 26 June 1754. This entry suggest that Little Deer was a Keschachewan leader but Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, argues convincingly that he was a Pegogoma Cree. There are four versions of Anthony Henday's journal, HBCA B.239/a/40 (written in Andrew Graham's hand) was sent to London in 1755; HBCA E.2/4 is in Andrew Grahams "Observations," dated 1768-9; HBCA E.2/6 is in his "Observations" of 1767-9 and HBCA E. 2/11 (published in Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country,") was copied in the 1770s or early 1780s. for a discussion see Glyndwr Williams, "The Puzzle of Anthony Henday's Journal, 1754-1755," *The Beaver* 309 (3)(1978): 41-56. The Governor and Committee of the HBC had asked James Isham to send someone inland to investigate the advances of the French traders from Canada and to attempt to draw the Indians of the northwestern plains directly to York Factory, HBCA A.6/8, 24 May 1753.

least 2000 people) the Archithinue listened as Henday tried to fulfil his mandate. The Leader of this encampment welcomed Henday and his party in a tent "large enough to contain fifty persons; where he received [them] seated on a clear (white) Buffalo skin, attended by 20 elderly men." Henday told his hosts that he had been sent to invite the young men to bring their furs to the Bay "in return for Powder, Shot, Guns, Cloth, Beads, &c" but the leader "only said that it was far off, & they could not paddle."[70] The following day Henday repeated his invitation, but the leader

> answered, it was far off, & they could not live without Buffalo flesh; and that they could not leave their horses &c: and many other obstacles, though all might be got over if they were acquainted with a Canoe, and could eat Fish, which they never do. The Chief further said they never wanted food, as they followed the Buffalo & killed them with the Bows & Arrows; and he was informed the Natives that frequented the Settlements, were oftentimes starved on their journey. ... He made [Henday] a present of a handsome Bow & Arrows, & in return [Henday] gave him a part of each kinds of goods [he] had, as ordered by Mr. Isham's written instructions.[71]

After spending the winter with a small Cree band in the forests, Henday learned the normal routine established between the various Archithinue bands and the Pegogoma and Saskatchewan bands of Cree. In late March and April various Cree and Assiniboine bands gathered birch bark and constructed canoes along the North Saskatchewan River. At the end of April, soon after the river ice broke up, they embarked down river.[72]

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[70] Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 337-8.

[71] Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 338.

[72] Burpee, "York Factory to Blackfeet Country," believed Henday's party to have travelled down the Red Deer/South Saskatchewan River, but Dale Russell has argued that he they went down the North Saskatchewan River (p. 96). Henday's indications of directions travelled each day do not match either river very well, but do suggest the South Saskatchewan. Henday, however, was rightly judged as having been poor at reckoning

Between 12 and 21 May on the lower North Saskatchewan they met Archithinue (Including Blood) bands with whom they exchanged the guns, kettles, hatchets, and knives they had acquired in the summer, for the wolf, beaver, and fox furs that the plains Indians had acquired in the winter. None of the Archithinue consented to make the trip to the Bay with Henday.[73] On 23 May Henday's hosts traded their most valuable furs at Fort á la Corne in exchange for the most valuable European goods, before proceeding to York Factory with the bulkier furs, including most of the furs traded from the Archithinue which they would trade for bulkier European items.[74]

Little Deer began his return to the interior in 1755 with Henday in company again, but Henday was forced to turn back when his HBC companion could not continue.[75] Little Deer, however, did host at least two other HBC delegates in the next ten years.[76] Indeed, between 1754 and 1774 no fewer than fifty-six HBC men travelled inland with interior Indians.[77] The Blackfoot, in these years made only rare visits to fur trade posts, but they had frequent contact with British traders.

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course and distances (See Governor and Committee to James Isham & Council at York Fort, HBCA A. 6/9, 12 May 1756). The breakup date of the river (23 April), the descriptions of the river, and the factors indicated by Russell certainly suggest the North Saskatchewan.

[73] Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 351.

[74] Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 352.

[75] HBCA B.239/a/39, 2 July 1755.

[76] Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 96.

[77] That these men went inland is noted in the York Factory journals. Most of these men, however, were illiterate, and have left no record of their visits.

Even as contacts with HBC traders increased, the French presence in the region ended. When Henday departed York Factory for his inland voyage, events had already begun to unfold that would end in the elimination of French power in North America. On 4 July 1754 the twenty-two year old adjutant-general of the Virginia militia, Major George Washington and his men began an ignominious retreat from the upper Ohio River basin after surrendering Fort Necessity to the French. The Great War for the Empire had begun. The war was fought in North America for two years before it spread to Europe. Even then British war minister, William Pitt, decided that British forces would concentrate on their war with France by forcing a showdown in North America. Many Natives of North America would participate in the war directly, but the war affected those of the northwestern plains only indirectly.

British war aims dovetailed well with the aims of the HBC. As the tide of the war turned against the French after 1757 and as the British blockade of France became effective, French traders in the interior were forced to withdraw or do without their supplies from Montreal. Fort á la Corne, for example, was apparently abandoned after 1757.[78] The war and subsequent uprising led by Pontiac strangled supply lines to the northwestern plains via Montreal and the Native inhabitants of the northwest found an important source of supplies dry up. The residents of the northwestern plains were once again a thousand miles from the closest fur trade post. The value of furs traded at York Factory, which had declined significantly since the 1730s, began to rebound in the late 1750s.[79] When William Pink was sent inland in 1766-7 with Mousinnikissack, he saw the remains of a French post, but his hosts told him that the French had left that post about ten years before.[80] The continued profitability of the HBC and concerns about the navigability of the river, gave HBC traders no incentive to establish inland posts.

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[78] Meyer and Thistle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers," 418, citing Antoine Champagne, *Nouvelles études sur "Les La Vérendrye et le poste de l'ouest."* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971), 54-7, 225-9. Some of the French stayed in the west but they were unable to get trading supplies from Canada, HBCA A. 11/115, Humphrey Marten (York Factory) to the Governor and Committee, (1759) fo. 37d. The rapid decline in the number of fur traders departing Montreal between 1754 and 1759 is graphically portrayed in R. Cole Harris, ed., *Historical Atlas of Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Vol. 1, plate 41.

With the French posts abandoned because of the Seven Years' War, the Natives of the northwestern plains were forced to turn back to the HBC as sole supplier of European goods. Not surprisingly, visits from the Blood Indians, which had ceased after the French reached the Saskatchewan River, resumed in 1758 and continued occasionally until 1763.[81] Although the Blackfoot visits to York Factory were probably motivated in part by curiosity — they were not routine or necessary for the Blackfoot — the fact that Blackfoot appearances at the Bay were most common when traders were absent from the interior suggests that the Blackfoot were directly affected by the withdrawal of these traders. At any rate, Blackfoot visits ceased completely after 1763 when competition resumed. The Blackfoot were evidently quite satisfied with their arrangement with their

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[79] Ray and Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure,"* 34.

[80] HBCA, B.239/a/56, 16 May 1767.

[81] James Isham (York Factory) to Ferdinand Jacobs (Fort Churchill), 17 July 1758, York Factory Correspondence Books, HBCA B.239/b/16, as quoted in Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55. James Isham and Council to Governor and Committee, 16 September 1758, HBCA A.11/115 fo. 16.

Cree suppliers.[82] For one thing, the Blackfoot found the trip to the Bay to be an annoyance that could be avoided. An "Archithinue" man told Andrew Graham at York Factory that their Cree suppliers charged them fifty beaver or wolf skins for a gun. Still, after being told that he could get a gun for fourteen Made Beaver (MB) at York Fort he "generously told me [Andrew Graham] they never would come down, and that he himself never would come down again, as he did not like to sit in the canoe and be obliged to eat fish and fowl as he had done mostly coming down."[83] The long trip to the Bay fit very poorly with the Blackfoot lifestyle. Furthermore, since the Blackfoot were not accustomed to travelling by canoe, they could only visit the posts with the guidance of their Cree suppliers. Since the Cree guides would have expected compensation of some kind for their services it is unlikely that the Blackfoot could have acquired guns any more cheaply by travelling to the Bay. Finally, the Blackfoot seemed disinclined to take the risks associated with the trip. In 1763 Ferdinand Jacobs at York Factory reported that "The Bloody Indians, were Some of them Starved to Death Last year going Back which So intimidated them that I am afraid we Shall never have any more of them Come to Trade."[84] Indeed, the Blood do not appear to have visited again. The reasons are clear.

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[82] E. E. Rich, ed., *James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743, and Notes and Observations on a Book Entitled "A Voyage to Hudson's Bay in the Dobbs Galley, 1749"* (Toronto, Champlain Society (vol. 12), 1949), 113.

[83] Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), 257. The Made Beaver was a unit of currency equal in value to one prime beaver skin.

[84] Ferdinand Jacobs (York Factory) to Moses Norton (Fort Churchill), 25 July 1763, York Factory Correspondence Books, HBCA B.239/b/24, as quoted in Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 60-1.

As early as 1766 HBC envoys began reporting the presence of Canadian "pedlars" on the Saskatchewan River.[85] In 1768 a promising young Orcadian recruit, William Tomison, returned from an inland voyage reporting "a vast Number of Pedlars" in the interior.[86] In 1772 Matthew Cocking visited the "Archithinue on the northwestern plains to encourage them to visit York Factory; but he reported that "notwithstanding all I could say, promising they should be greatly rewarded; they were all unwilling alledging they were unwilling to leave their Families and feared a scarcity of Provision."[87]

The Blackfoot and the Atsina may well have been fully satisfied with their arrangements with their Cree and Assiniboine suppliers in the 1760s. With the aid of Cree and Assiniboine bands the Blackfoot had, by 1770, turned back the southern bands, and now felt secure in the Red Deer River basin. Further victories seemed assured. The HBC, however, could no longer afford to ignore the encroachments of the Canadian traders. Reluctantly but deliberately the company began establishing inland settlements initiating an era of fierce Euroamerican competition for the trade of northwestern North America. As a result, the Blackfoot and Atsina would establish constant direct trading relationships with Euroamericans — relationships that would have far-reaching consequences for the all the Natives of the northwestern plains.

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[85] Andrew Graham and Council to Governor and Committee, 18 August 1766, HBCA A.11/115.

[86] Andrew Graham and Council to Governor and Committee, 18 August 1768, HBCA A.11/115.

[87] HBCA B.239/a/69, 15 December 1772.

Chapter Six
The Right Hand of Death: 1766-1782

> If one of our people offers you his left hand, give him your left hand, for the right hand is no mark of friendship. This hand wields the spear, draws the Bow and the trigger of the gun; it is the hand of death.
>
> Young Man, 1787[1]

> This plaguey disorder [smallpox] by what I can hear was brought from the Snake Indians last Summer, by the Different Tribes that trades about this River, I can remember the time altho' it is but a few Years that they did not go to War above Once in three, but now they have got such great supplies of Ammunition &c. that they dont [*sic*] know what to do with it, they go every Year, if their [*sic*] had been None but Your Honors Settlements as usual, I dont think any thing of this kind would have fell amongst them.
>
> William Walker, 1781[2]

In the upper basin of the Rio Grande, the chronic warfare between the Spanish settlers in New Mexico and the neighbouring nomadic Natives reached a violent climax during the 1770s. In contrast, Euroamerican fur traders, who were expanding their operations onto the margins of the northern plains at the same time, established generally peaceful relations with Native groups. With an eye to their own profits, these traders also worked to promote peace among Native groups on the northern plains. Nevertheless, as William Walker and other fur traders ruefully noted, the increased flow of guns and ammunition to the northern plains seemed only to encourage more frequent and deadly warfare. The history of the northern plains between 1766 and 1782 seems to illustrate Alfred Crosby's pithy axiom that "whether the Europeans and Africans came to the native Americans in war or peace, they always brought death with them."[3] Crosby, of course, was alluding to the effects of Old World diseases on Natives, not the effects of European weaponry. It was smallpox transmitted to the Natives at New Mexico, not Spanish or British arms that killed the most inhabitants of the Great Plains between 1766 and 1782. The pandemic of 1781-82 that devastated every human community on the Great Plains except those of Euroamerican traders on the Saskatchewan River, is arguably the most significant known event in the Native history of the Great Plains. Even at the time, the perceptive William Walker understood that the horse and gun revolution and the escalating warfare on the plains facilitated the spread of the smallpox epidemic that killed so many Natives there.[4] The horse and the gun revolution, and the smallpox pandemic of the early 1780s were closely related.

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[1] Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 50-1.

[2] E. E. Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1779-1782* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1952), Hudson House, 22 October 1781.

The horse and gun revolution brought tremendous changes to the northwestern plains by the 1760s, and adjustments continued thereafter, but the period between 1766 and 1782 witnessed other changes that intensified past patterns even as they foreshadowed dramatic realignments. By 1770, equestrianism had spread to Native bands throughout the northwestern plains and beyond. Conversely, guns did not spread to all these groups by 1770. Indeed, the disparity between gun-rich bands in the northeast and gun-poor groups of the southwest increased between 1770 and 1805. The result, however, was an intensification of the patterns of warfare, trade, and diplomacy that already existed. The coalition among horse-rich and gun-poor bands that dominated the northwestern plains between 1700 and 1750 was unquestionably on the defensive against the coalition of horse and gun owning bands that dominated the region between 1770 and 1805. Native groups to the southwest remained wealthier in horses than the groups to the northeast, although their large horse herds gave them little military advantage. Indeed, their affluence made them a particular target of horse raiders. Because of trade patterns, groups to the northeast always had overwhelming superiority in gun ownership, and this superiority was of decisive military import. The northeastern groups enjoyed such military advantages that they waged the same kind of aggressive warfare against the southwestern coalition that the southwestern coalition had waged against them half a century before.

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[3] Alfred W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (1976): 299.

[4] See the epigram above.

The period between 1766 and 1782 also brought the first hints of the circumstances that dominated the northwestern plains until the 1830s. The generally symbiotic relations that existed among the northeastern bands continued during this period but the basis for these relations was eroding away. Meanwhile, factors arose that encouraged conflict within the coalition. The seeds of the general hostility that existed between the Blackfoot and Atsina and the Cree and Assiniboine bands from around 1810 to the end of the bison era were sown by 1782.

Between 1766 and 1782 a significant Euroamerican presence reemerged on the northern plains, a presence that did not merely replicate conditions of the French era but which unleashed new factors with important implications for the Natives of the northwestern plains. The development of equestrianism and the development and expansion of a significant provisions trade between 1766 and 1780 encouraged certain western Cree bands to orient their lives increasingly towards the resources of the plains. Cordial relations and kin connections between forest bands and plains bands facilitated this development. At the same time, these very developments created the conditions that undermined friendly relations among these bands.

Euroamerican Expansion to 1782

Between 1766 and 1782 a significant Euroamerican presence expanded to the very margins of the northwestern plains. It is not easy to piece together the Euroamerican expansion on the northern plains in this era because the traders from Montreal who took the initiative left few records. It is clear that the Natives of the northwestern plains had little direct trade with Euroamerican traders before 1782. Between 1730 and 1756 the flow of Euroamerican goods onto the northern plains increased gradually although direct contact between the Blackfoot, Atsina, and Sarcee and newcomers was limited to occasional visits brokered by Cree and Assiniboine intermediaries. During the Great War for the Empire (1754-1763) and the subsequent uprising led by Pontiac, the Euroamerican presence on the northern plains diminished to a few French-Canadian stragglers with little or no access to European goods and HBC envoys who traveled in company with Cree or Assiniboine guides. With the fall of Montreal in 1760, the HBC may have supposed that their monopoly of the fur trade of the northern plains was assured. Instead, a more serious competition was about to emerge, chiefly from Montreal.[5]

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[5] France ceded Louisiana to Spain in November 1762 to prevent it from falling into English hands, but Spain had little ability to make effective use of the northwestern plains.

Now freed from French imperial restrictions and the limited capital available in New France, and now incorporated into the British Empire, the traders from Montreal gained access to British manufactures and to the Brazilian tobacco that the Natives of the northwest so preferred over the tobacco the French had traded.[6] For a few years before and after the fall of New France the HBC did enjoy a monopoly. The value of furs traded at York Factory grew steadily in the late 1750s and early 1760s before beginning a precipitous free fall around 1763.[7] It was during those monopoly years that the Natives of the northwestern plains traveled to York Factory again. "Bloody Indians" visited in 1758 for the first time since 1733. In 1763, however, the visits stopped again. HBC trader at York Factory, Andrew Graham, attributed the end of these visits to the difficulties of the voyage, but he was correct only to a small degree. Clearly it was the effects of imperial struggle that had channelled furs and Natives towards York Factory between 1756 and 1763; and with the imperial struggle over in 1763, those furs began flowing back toward the Montreal. HBC emissaries sent inland had had little influence over Native traders before 1763 and they had little influence afterwards. Whenever European goods were available to the Natives on the Saskatchewan River, few furs made their way to York Factory. And it was not simply a matter of the Blackfoot being reluctant to visit the Bay. Prominent Cree trader, White Bird, who had begun appearing at York Factory in 1755, stopped coming in 1770, preferring to deal with the Canadians rather than making the trip to York Factory.[8]

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[6] In 1755 Henday had argued that if the French had had access to Brazil tobacco, the Indians might not have travelled to the Bay at all, Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 353. This aspect of the fur trade is ably discussed in Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 166-80, and in the various major works of E.E. Rich.

[7] Ray and Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure,"* 34.

The Canadian traders began appearing on the Saskatchewan River around 1766. William Pink saw no evidence of them on the Saskatchewan River in 1766[9] but already in 1768 Francois Leblanc, a veteran of the French fur trade, built a post at "Nipowiwinihk" (Nipawin) not far downstream from the abandoned Fort á la Corne.[10] It was in that year that William Tomison reported seeing "a vast Number of Pedlars" in the interior.[11] The Canadian posts, like the French posts established in the 1740s and 1750s were located at important Cree rendezvous centers.[12]

Unlike the French posts of the earlier decades, these posts induced the HBC finally to establish settlements in the interior. The HBC initially responded to the renewed competition only by continuing its old custom of hiring Cree and Assiniboine leaders to guide its representatives to the interior to encourage Natives to travel to the

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[8] HBCA A. 11/115 Andrew Graham to Governor and Council, 26 August 1772.

[9] Natives brought goods they acquired from Canadian traders to York Factory in 1766, HBCA A. 11/115, Andrew Graham (York Factory) to Governor and Committee, 18 August 1766 (fo. 101).

[10] Meyer and Thistle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers," 419. This is apparently the post that Cocking visited in 1772. Alexander Henry mentioned the remains of a fur trade post that he dated from the late 1760s on the North Saskatchewan above the site of Hudson House although the site probably in reality dates to the 1770s. See Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal,* 354.

[11] Andrew Graham and Council to Governor and Committee, 18 August 1768, HBCA A. 11/115.

[12] This is shown in Meyer and Thisle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers."

Bay. If anything, however, the practice was counterproductive. In 1768 Ferdinand Jacobs remarked that the HBC's envoys "have not the Least Influence to put a Stop to it [Native trade with the Canadians]," even as company officials complained that these envoys conducted a considerable (prohibited) private trade with Native bands. Jacobs understood that the only solution for the HBC was to build trading establishments inland where it could maintain relationships with the Native leaders like White Bird who wielded influence over the direction of the trade.[13] The lack of reliable men, however, made it impossible to carry out the project until after 1772-3 when Matthew Cocking, one of the company's more talented servants, made an inland journey.

One of the more frequent HBC visitors to the northwestern plains in the 1750s and 1760s was Isaac Batt. Batt was inland most years between 1758 and 1773, and thus was familiar with the Canadian infiltration.[14] In May 1773, however, Batt was in England visiting with the London Committee of the HBC. The Committee had sought Batt's advice after becoming alarmed by the reduction in their trade on account of the Canadian traders operating from Montreal. Batt probably convinced the committee of the absolute need for the company to establish inland settlements, and on 26 May 1773 "upon mature Deliberation," the London Committee decided "that it would be to the Advantage of the Companys Trade to establish a Settlement Inland at or near Basquiau." Samuel Hearne and Matthew Cocking were ordered to establish the post and seventeen additional men were to be hired at the Orkney Islands to supplement the company's personnel.[15]

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[13] HBCA A. 11/115, Ferdinand Jacobs to the Governor and Committee, 20 August 1768, (fo. 116d). Also see HBCA A. 11/115, Andrew Graham to the Governor and Committee, 26 August 1772 (142d); 30 August 1773 (fo. 161d).

[14] Tyrrell, *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor*, 5-6.

Accordingly, Hearne and Cocking established Cumberland House in 1774 and there renewed contact with White Bird.[16] By 1774, however, rival Canadian traders were already competing with each other considerably farther upstream (Figure 6.1). Unable to supply itself with canoes or personnel in sufficient numbers, the HBC expanded its operations much more slowly.[17] The company was forced to depend for its services on Cree men like Mameek Athinnee, who despite his insolent behaviour was one of the few willing to provide certain services to the company.[18] The HBC also continued sending envoys bands farther in the interior. In the winter of 1776-7, for instance, the promising young recruits, Scotsman Robert Longmoor, and Orcadian Malchom Ross spent the winter among plains Assiniboine at the Eagle Hills.[19] Throughout the interior, however, the various Canadian concerns took the initiative.

While the HBC expansion was crippled by a shortage of canoes, Canadian expansion was hindered by ruthless competition and their aggressive approach towards

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[15] HBCA A. 1/44, fo. 79-79d.

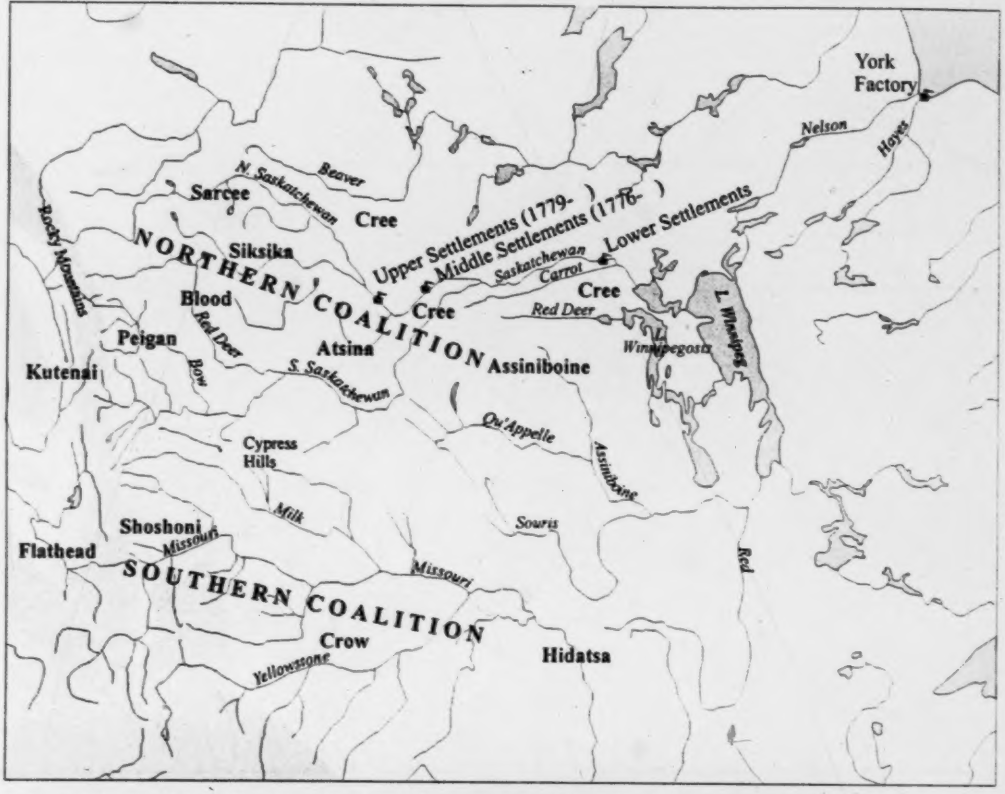
[16] E. E. Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1775-1779* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951), Cumberland House Journals, 13 May 1780.

[17] See Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), lxii-lxix. Rich explains that the canoe shortage was the most urgent concern at this time but that once that problem was solved in 1780, the British war efforts led to a chronic manpower shortage over the next decades.

[18] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), 159.

[19] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), 115.

Figure 6.1
Location of Euroamerican Trading Centres and Native Groups about 1781


York Factory
Nelson
Hayes
Beaver
N. Saskatchewan
Sarcee
Cree
Rocky Mountains
NORTHERN COALITION
Siksika
Upper Settlements (1779-)
Middle Settlements (1776-)
Lower Settlements
Saskatchewan
Carrot
Cree
Blood
Red Deer
Cree
Red Deer
L. Winnipeg
Winnipegosis
Peigan
Atsina
Assiniboine
Kutenai
Bow
S. Saskatchewan
Qu'Appelle
Assiniboine
Cypress Hills
Milk
Souris
Shoshoni
Missouri
Flathead
Missouri
Red
SOUTHERN COALITION
Crow
Yellowstone
Hidatsa

Between 1774 and 1782 Euroamericans rapidly expanded their operations in the Saskatchewan River Basin. The lower settlements were located in the subarctic forests. They included the HBC's Cumberland House which was established in 1774, after Canadian traders had already settled there. The lower settlements became an important supply post for the northern brigades. The Middle Settlements were established beginning in 1776. They were located near the lowest point on the North Saskatchewan River from which the bison herds were easily accessible. They included the HBC's Hudson House. The Upper Settlements included Umfreville's House and Pangman's House. They became important supply centres for the bands of the northwestern plains. The fur traders often referred to all posts in the Middle Settlement and above as the "Forts des Prairies." The entire northern coalition of bands had reliable access to Euroamerican goods but the southern coalition did not. A broad contested zone separated the northern and southern bands. The locations of ethnic groups as shown on this map represents the locations of Native bands during a typical winter. In reality, band territories were not firm. For example, a Sarcee band could spend part of a winter with a Cree band near the Eagle Hills, while a Cree band could winter with a Peigan band near the Bow River.

Natives. The effects of the United States War for Independence led to greater unity among Canadian trading concerns but before 1779 the traders coming from the St. Lawrence were particularly disunited.[20] Greater moves toward amalgamation occurred in 1779. In 1778 several traders pooled their resources to support Peter Pond's journey to the Athabasca basin. When Pond returned from this fabulously successful expedition, the Canadian traders recognized that the fur riches of the Athabasca could not be tapped profitably unless competition was reduced and capital was pooled, and thus emerged a new consortium of Canadian fur traders.[21] The intense rivalry among the Canadians encouraged rapid expansion, but their aggressive tactics delayed their expansion towards the northwestern plains.

The Canadians' aggressive tactics were probably counterproductive everywhere, but they were more successful in the subarctic than on the plains.[22] On the plains, bands were much larger, more accustomed to intense and continual warfare, and less reliant on

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[20] In 1775 Alexander Henry the Elder described the interior traders from Canada as "in a state of extreme reciprocal hostility, each pursuing his interests in such a manner as might most injure his neighbours," but in 1776 he noted that traders along the Saskatchewan River had formed coalitions, James Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776 by Alexander Henry Fur Trader* (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1901), 235, 320. There has been some debate about when the North West Company came to exist. The name was first used to describe a coalition of traders from Montreal in 1776 but increasingly large temporary organizations assumed the name after 1779.

[21] Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 196-9.

[22] E.E. Rich discusses the evidence of Canadian fraud and violence supplied by HBC and NWC sources in *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), xliii, lv. The journals contained in that volume also supply examples. See Hudson House Journals, 20 November 1779.

European goods than were bands in the subarctic.[23] The Canadians found themselves on the losing end of confrontations. The HBC journals suggest that Indians had killed three Canadians on the Saskatchewan River in 1776-7, perhaps dissuading the Canadians from travelling above Cumberland House the following year.[24]

The HBC, moving more slowly, enjoyed more cordial relations with Natives of the region. This fact gave them an important advantage when dealing with Natives on the margins of the plains. In the autumn of 1778 Robert Longmoor, stopped by an unusually early winter, established a temporary HBC post at the Canadians' "middle settlement" at Sturgeon River.[25] A more permanent Hudson House was established fourteen miles downstream the following year, manned by a force of experienced inland travelers like William Tomison, Robert Longmoor, mixed-blood servants from the York Factory region like Charles Isham, and new Orcadian recruits like James Tate. By 1779, however, the Canadians had established their "upper settlements" on the lower North Saskatchewan River near the Eagle Hills. In was at the upper settlements on 22 April 1779 that a group of Cree on the North Saskatchewan River, resentful of the callousness, fraudulence, and abusive treatment they received at the hands of Canadian traders, attacked Canadian traders at the Eagle Hills killing two men, including New Englander, John Cole.[26] As a result the Canadians abandoned their Eagle Hills establishment leaving the HBC's Hudson House as the uppermost trading post during the 1780-1 season.[27]

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[23] Fur traders recognized the difference between life on the plains and in the forests, and were intimidated by the large bands, military power, frequent warfare, and "independence" of the plains bands. See Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 345-6; A. S. Morton, ed., *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-5* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), 47, 51.

[24] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), Cumberland House Journals, 9 June 1777, 5 September 1777.

[25] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), Robert Longmoor (Hudson House) to William Tomison (Cumberland House), 23 February 1779 (p. 323). Posts at or above the Middle Settlement were also known as "Forts des Prairies."

Euroamericans became more familiar with the residents of the northwestern plains after 1770. Until the 1770s the HBC traders merely referred to non-Cree and non-Assiniboine inhabitants of the plains as "Archithinue." In December 1772 Matthew Cocking learned considerably more. After meeting a band of "Yeachithinnee" Cocking elaborated:

> These Natives are called Powestick Athinnewock or Water-fall Indians. The [Cree] people I am with inform me there are four Nations more which go under the name of Yeachithinnee Indians with whom they are in friendship. Viz. Mithco Athinneewock or Blood Indians, Koskiketow Wathussituck or black foot Indians; Pigonew Athinnewock or muddy Water Indians and Sussewuck or woody Country Indians [Sarcee]. Their Enemies also go under the general Name of Yeachithinnee Indians, four Nations, Kanapick Athinneewock or Snake Indians [Shoshoni]: Wahtee or vault Indians [Hidatsa and perhaps the Crow] Kuttunnayewuck [Kutenai] and Nah-puck Ushquanuck or flat Head Indians so called they tell me from their foreheads being very flat."[28]

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[26] This incident appears to have had an important part in NWC oral traditions. Accounts of it can be found in the journals of many NWC traders. For a discussion see Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), xlvii-xlvix. Some accounts are found in Tyrrell, *Thompson's Narrative*, 320, Morton, (quote from Alexander Mackenzie) *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, xxxiii-xxxiv, and Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 361. Some sources suggest that the attack took place in 1780 but Rich argues convincingly that it occurred in 1779. Reference to the "ringleaders ... that killed the Frenchmen and Robbed them, two years ago" can also be found in Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), Hudson House Journals, 4 March 1781.

[27] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), lii.

[28] HBCA B.239/a/69, 1 December 1772. The lack of a reference to the Crow suggests that the Cree may not yet be aware that these people have formed a separate identity.

Thus Cocking's journal describes in detail for the first time, the general alignment of bands on the northwestern plains in this era.

The Intensification of Prevailing Patterns on the Northwestern Plains

Early in this century, historians agreed that the expansion of the fur trade onto the margins of the northern plains in the last quarter of the eighteenth century resulted in tremendous cultural changes and economic dependency among the Native inhabitants of the region. In contrast, anthropologists neglected the fur trade until pioneer ethnohistorian, Oscar Lewis, argued that "the fur trade was the mainspring of Blackfoot culture change."[29] According to the prevailing view at the time, the superior technology of the newcomers overwhelmed the Native inhabitants, leading them to abandon ancient ways of life. In 1967 E. E. Rich argued that Natives living in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains were dependent on European goods long before Europeans themselves began trading with them directly. He wrote of Natives living in the Hudson Bay basin that

> within a decade of their becoming acquainted with European goods, tribe after tribe became utterly dependent on regular European supplies. The bow and arrow went out of use, and the Indian starved if he did not own a serviceable gun, powder, and shot; and in his tribal wars he was even more dependent on European arms. Steel traps replaced wooden ones more slowly, but by 1743 it was reported that the Indians who traded to York Fort were completely dependent on the arrival of a ship from England.[30]

The 1970s witnessed a surge of sophisticated studies into the history of the Indian in the fur trade and since then fur trade historians and ethnohistorians have overthrown the view that the Natives in the fur trade were merely passive and naive pawns in the fur trade.

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[29] Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact on Blackfoot Culture*, 61.

[30] E. E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857*, 102-3.

Beginning in 1974 and increasingly since, scholars have portrayed the Natives as active and sophisticated participants in this trade.[31] The approach and arrival of Euroamerican fur traders and their wares did not bring rapid economic dependence or "cultural amnesia," but it did bring new opportunities and challenges for every band on the northwestern plains. The result was very significant upheaval and change. After 1766 the degree to which various groups had access to European goods had a tremendous impact on their destiny.

It is evident that rapid and substantial changes brought to the northern plains could reinforce rather than undermine many of the fundamental aspects of community life on the Great Plains. Just as the immense changes brought on by the coming of the horse could reify Blackfoot beliefs, so could the coming of European goods and the Euroamericans themselves. The Blackfoot word for Whites, *Napikwan* (Oldman Person), invokes the image of *Napi* (Oldman), the Blackfoot creator. The word probably originated between 1700 and 1730 when the Blackfoot met some French traders. Evidently then, the arrival of Europeans tended to reify Blackfoot religious beliefs rather than undermine them. As contact continued, the Blackfoot, like other groups would have understood that Euroamericans were not, as they initially believed, connected with any "gods."[32] The literature published since 1970 also makes it clear that Euroamericans exerted little influence over Natives and that Euroamerican trade goods significantly eased Native subsistence without radically changing the way Native people perceived their world. Still, the significant advantages that access to European goods accorded Native peoples made it crucially important for Native groups on the plains to acquire them. It is the unequal access to these goods that acted so significantly to shape the history of the region after 1766.

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[31] Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, Ray and Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure."*

[32] For an excellent survey see Bruce G. Trigger, "Early Native North American Responses to European Contact: Romantic versus Rationalistic Interpretations," *Journal of North American History* 77 (1991): 1195-1215. The Blackfoot example is discussed in Theodore Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," 12.

Cultural continuity then, coexisted with dynamic change during the early fur trade era. The arrival of Euroamerican weaponry among the western Cree and the Blackfoot in the 1730s had already led to the end of the Shoshoni-Crow dominance of the northwestern plains by the 1750s. At the same time, the effects of the horse and gun revolution had encouraged Cree, Assiniboine, and Blackfoot bands to form or strengthen symbiotic relationships in which antagonisms were deliberately soothed. In the late 1760s and the 1770s, the increasingly easy access by the Cree, Blackfoot, and Assiniboine of the northern plains to Euroamerican goods allowed them to dominate the northwestern plains as unquestioningly as the Shoshoni-Crow system had dominated it in the fifty years before.

The disparity in gun ownership on the northwestern plains, a reality since 1730, intensified between 1766 and 1782. The flow of European goods to the region between 1756 and 1766 was probably less than it was in earlier years, but it clearly never stopped. After 1766 this flow increased dramatically. As a result, those same groups that benefitted from the Saskatchewan River trade before 1756 benefitted even more as the volume of European goods increased after 1766. In contrast, those groups that had little access to European goods before 1760 saw no improvement before 1785. During the French era, trade in European goods at the Mandan and Hidatsa villages was irregular and was dominated by Assiniboine intermediaries. There is no evidence that Natives of the northwestern plains, like the Crow or Shoshoni, acquired firearms via the Missouri villages during the French era. Given that there is little evidence of any direct trade between these villagers and Euroamerican traders again before 1785, it is unlikely that guns diffused to the Crow or Shoshoni via the Missouri villages in this era.[33] The Shoshoni and Crow occasionally used guns against the Blackfoot and Cree as early as 1770, but these guns apparently fell into their hands after a successful raid on their enemies. Furthermore, they apparently were not proficient in the use of guns.[34] Evidently, these guns were militarily insignificant. For this reason those groups that had no access to Euroamerican goods before 1756 suffered even more after 1766.

For the Blackfoot, Atsina, and Sarcee, direct contact with Euroamerican traders between 1766 and 1782 remained sporadic, but their access to European goods via Cree and Assiniboine intermediaries was secure. The volume of goods that made it to the northwestern plains clearly increased substantially. As a result, their own subsistence became easier. Evidently the larger volume of trade induced the Natives of the northwestern plains to rely on European goods where articles of domestic manufacture had hitherto remained important. The archaeological record shows that the Blackfoot had produced pottery for many years. The last documentary evidence that the Blackfoot manufactured their own pottery and fire making implements, however, dates to 1772.[35] Natives also appear to have adopted metal arrowheads very readily.

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[33] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains,* 26, 70. Also see John C. Jackson, "Brandon House and the Mandan Connection," *North Dakota History* 49 (1982): 12-14.

[34] HBCA B.239/a/63, 1 April 1770.

Just as their subsistence became easier, the military power of the northeastern coalition increased. The unequal distribution of European weaponry allowed the northeastern coalition, including Cree and Assiniboine participants, to wage unrelenting warfare on the southwestern coalition.[36] Those groups to the southwest with scant access to European goods found themselves increasingly vulnerable. Little wonder that the Blackfoot bands, who had abandoned the Oldman River basin only decades earlier, yearly fought to regain access to the rich resources of that region. Little wonder that the still horse-poor Cree and Assiniboine bands participated in warfare against the horse-rich southwestern groups. Only the inability of these nomadic groups actually to control and patrol the vast region allowed others to maintain themselves there. Shoshoni, Crow, Kutenai, and Flathead bands continued to live on the Upper Missouri and Oldman River basins, although with their meager access to European weaponry, their warfare at this time was primarily defensive.

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[35] HBCA B.239/a/69, 5 December 1772.

[36] HBC journals make mention of Cree, Assiniboine, and Blackfoot warfare against the "Snake." See HBCA B. 239/a/63, 1 April 1770, B.239/a/69, 16 December 1772, Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), Cumberland House Journals, 7 February 1777, 22 August 1779. Also see Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, 303-4. William Walker's comment quoted in the epigram of this chapter, however, is the best indication that the frequency of these warring expeditions increased in these years. Also see Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 177. Young Man also implied that Cree warriors continued to participate in Peigan battles in this era, Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 49.

Emerging Patterns

While the approach of Euroamericans intensified old patterns of trade and warfare, it also introduced new dynamics that reshaped patterns of trade, warfare, and diplomacy in the ensuing decades. Some relationships changed manifestly before 1782, but the roots of other changes lie in these years. The arrival of the horse on the northern plains, combined with the arrival of European traders led various Cree band to orient their lives increasingly to an equestrian bison-hunting lifestyle. The implications for relationships among various bands was enormous.

Until the 1750s the western woods Cree and the Assiniboine were but minor factors on the northwestern plains.[37] The Assiniboine resided on the plains to the east while the Cree were primarily forest and parkland dwellers. The arrival of horses among the Cree and Assiniboine by the 1750s began to change this. Some parkland bands increasingly oriented themselves to a plains existence. While canoes were well suited to subsistence in parkland and forest, and were essential to trading expeditions to Hudson Bay, they were not well suited to a plains existence based on bison hunting, and unnecessary for visits to fur trade posts on the North Saskatchewan River. Neither were horses well suited to life in the forests. In the 1750s and 1760s, those trading bands that had the regular contact and cordial relations with the Blackfoot and Atsina bands were drawn by horse ownership to consider adaptation to a bison-hunting plains existence. This entailed a gradual westward and southerly movement. There is documentary evidence for the westward movements of specific Cree bands. In 1787 David Thompson informed Young Man that "sons of those he left there [at the Pasquiau River] hunted on the north bank of the [North Saskatchewan] River, many days march above it, that the lowest of them were on the west side of the Eagle Hills and that his country was now hunted upon by the Indians whom in his time were eastward of Lake Winipeg [*sic*]."[38] Little obstructed their migration. These Cree bands had cordial relations and kin connections with plains bands who would not only accept the newcomer bands but were willing to train them in bison procurement strategies. Still, the Cree may not have made substantial movements and permanent adaptation to the plains until after the arrival of European traders in the late 1760s and the 1770s and 1780s. In 1780 William Tomison reported that four Sturgeon River Cree had arrived from a bison pound but "they say they have had but little Success as yet by reason they are all Southward Indians, that is there, and not thoroughly acquainted with the method of driving Buffalo into the pound."[39] The annual canoe trip to Hudson Bay was essential to the trading bands. Any need or desire to make this trip then, hindered the adoption of a full-time equestrian and bison hunting lifestyle. As the Blackfoot had already understood, the annual trip to the Hudson Bay was uninviting to equestrian bands. For this reason the arrival of Euroamerican traders to the interior was so important to western Cree bands. The trading bands who had relied on their role as intermediaries in the fur trade did not resist the arrival of Euroamerican traders now because it facilitated their own adjustment to a plains lifestyle without jeopardizing their access to European goods.[40]

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[37] Considerable and convincing evidence has now been presented that Cree bands occupied the western forests as far west as Lac la Biche well before the fur trade era, Dale Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*; James G.E. Smith, "The Western Woods Cree: Anthropological Myth and Historical Reality," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987): 434-48. There is little evidence for the existence of the Plains Cree before the fur trade era, however.

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[38] Glover *David Thompson's Narrative*, 49.

[39] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), 11 January 1780 (p. 84).

The return of Euroamericans to the Saskatchewan River after 1763 was not a mere re-enactment of the earlier French trade. Within a few years, the number of non-Natives on the Saskatchewan River exceeded the number that had visited during the French period. Furthermore, the reappearance of fur traders to the Saskatchewan was soon accompanied by a rapid expansion of the fur trade into the northwestern subarctic forests where the finest furs on the continent were to be found. Euroamerican traders could not hope to conduct a profitable fur trade on the Saskatchewan River or in the subarctic without an outside supply of provisions. The result was the development of an important trade in provisions on the northern plains.[41]

The lower Saskatchewan River region may have been a region of plenty of furs but it was a region of few provisions. Almost immediately upon establishing settlements in the lower Saskatchewan the traders were drawn to the upper Saskatchewan not only to acquire more furs, but to supply their traders on the lower Saskatchewan.[42] Thus,

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[40] John Milloy's argument then, that Cree bands did migrate westward in response to the fur trade, and that the appearance of the horse may have prompted specific Cree bands to adopt a plains lifestyle, is essentially correct, even if his assumption that the Cree were limited to the region east of Lake Winnipeg until the fur trade era is probably incorrect. See Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 5, 24.

[41] See Arthur J. Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade," *Prairie Forum* 9 (1984): 263-80.

[42] This was evidently the case in the French era as it was now in the British era.

Canadians had developed a provisions trade by the early 1770s and the HBC later in the same decade. When the HBC established Cumberland House in 1774, Canadian traders were already established considerably farther upstream. The traders at Cumberland House, however, immediately discovered what earlier traders must have learned very quickly and what local Natives had warned them of: that the resources of the region could not support as many men as they might wish to keep at the post. This led inevitably to the conclusion made in early 1777 that,

> this inforces the necessity of the Company's making an early Settlement up above towards the Buffalo Country, where men may most likely be well provided for. ... Provisions may also be Collected at an Upper Settlement to assist this Place; Since the Pedlers have been so numerous, those who resided at the Upper Settlements have generally provided a Supply of Provisions to help their fellow Traders in the Spring who resided in the Lakes, otherwise these would be distressed in their Journey Down.[43]

Thus, when the HBC sent Robert Longmoor up river in the autumn of 1778, Longmoor established Hudson House convenient both to the Thickwood Hills to the northwest and the prairies to the south to serve the dual purpose of collecting moose and bison provisions and competing with the Canadians.[44] The post was on the border between plains and parkland at the lowest point on the North Saskatchewan from which the bison herds were easily accessible.[45] The HBC, however, constituted only a small part of the market for plains provisions. In 1776 there were nearly a hundred Canadian traders on the Saskatchewan River. Only two years later the Canadians numbered about three hundred.[46] Unlike previous Native traders, who were merely subsistence hunters on trading expeditions, the Euroamerican newcomers were trading specialists who kept their subsistence efforts to a minimum. As they traveled Canadian traders needed to minimize the cargo space they devoted to provisions and time they devoted to hunting. Clearly then, the traders on the Saskatchewan River itself formed a valuable market for provisions in the late 1760s and early 1770s, but the provisions market grew tremendously in the late 1770s and early 1780s when the Canadian traders expanded their operations into the rich fur lands of the Athabasca. The subarctic forests simply did not have a deep enough resource base to supply the traders. Traders needed a compact, nutritious, and imperishable food supply to take with them. Pemmican was the answer.

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[43] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), 111-12

[44] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), 188. The Governor and Committee also sought expansion towards the plains "in hopes that We shall thereby get into possession of Wolves which are extremely valuable in Our Trade"; HBCA A. 6/11 Governor and Committee to Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory, 14 May 1777 (fo. 104d). Also see HBCA A. 6/11, Governor and Committee to Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory, 4 May 1780 (fo. 163).

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[45] When he passed the site of Lower Hudson House on 5 September 1808, Alexander Henry the Younger remarked that "we may now be said to have got to the entrance of the Plains. The Banks began to rise on both sides and encroach upon the River. Wood begins to be scarce and dispersed only with some small Hemlocks while the country in general is open and Barren ground, with delightful, elevated Banks. ... when the wind blows hard we are much troubled on board the Canoes by the vast quantities of dry sand which is blown about from off those extensive and numerous banks, and has the appearance of a great Snow drift on a very snowy, Blustery Winter day. We now began to observe on each side of River many deep beaten paths of the Buffalo where they had forded the River." Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal,* 353-4. A very similar passage referring to the same general location ("La Montée" or "the Crossing Place") can be found in Morton, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 22. Also see Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), Hudson House Journals, 8 October 1779, and Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 52. Indeed, a survey of HBC journals shows that traders always began hunting bison near here as they traveled upstream.

[46] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), lxxxiii.

Traders on the northern plains acquired fresh, dried, and pounded bison meat which post personnel rendered into pemmican and transported downstream to Cumberland House, the main provisions supply depot for northern canoe brigades. Thus, after 1763 the provisions trade quickly became important to many bands on the northern plains.

The emergence of a provisioning trade encouraged the adaptation to the Plains that the arrival of the horse had already stimulated.[47] Cree and Assiniboine bands that had formerly used the plains only seasonally as traders, now gravitated towards the plains full-time, primarily as provisioners. They also immediately seized opportunities to increase the value of their provisions by hindering fur traders' efforts to hunt for themselves. Their primary tool was an old familiar tool: fire. Alexander Henry the Elder reported to HBC traders at Cumberland House that during the winter of 1775-6 Cree bands burned grass deliberately in a successful attempt to drive up the price they could get for meat: "he said that the Pedlers require so much Food, (being near a hundred) for present Use & to supply them in their Journey down, that the Natives seem to have little occasion to Trap Furrs, for what with trading Provisions, lending their Women to Masters and Men they obtain more necessaries than they want."[48] Cree bands responded the same way to the HBC after its traders began collecting provisions at Hudson House. In the fall of 1780 HBC traders noted that the "Natives have burnt all the Ground, that nothing can Stay on it, their design is that they may get a great deal for provisions, as a very few is hunting of furs."[49]

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[47] Scholars have rightly emphasized the importance of the provisions trade in encouraging the emergence of the Plains Cree, but have neglected the importance of the development of equestrianism among certain Cree bands in this development.

[48] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1951), 10 March 1776.

In sum, the approach and arrival of Euroamericans in the 1760s and 1770s was a separate process from the horse and gun revolution that had preceded it. In many way, the actual arrival of Euroamericans reinforced the patterns established earlier, but in other ways brought its own unique forces. Compounding these changes was the smallpox epidemic of 1781-2. The epidemic too, intensified established patterns of human interaction, but also unleashed new forces.

Smallpox on the Northern Plains, 1781-2

After sparing the residents of Mexico City for almost twenty years, smallpox broke out in Mexico City in August of 1779, gaining a solid foothold in the city the following month. There the disease raged into early 1780 killing about 18,000 residents.[50] The disease may have spread to New Mexico as early as 1780, but two waves of smallpox swept through the towns of Albuquerque and Santa Fe in the first months of 1781. The epidemic must have been devastating for the New Mexicans who had just endured the worst decade of

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[49] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), Hudson House, 31 October 1780. Duncan M'Gillivray mentioned the same motivations in 1794, Morton, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 33.

[50] Marc Simmons, "New Mexico's Smallpox Epidemic of 1780-81," *New Mexico Historical Review* 41 (1966): 323. Donald B. Cooper, *Epidemic Disease in Mexico City 1761-1813: An Administrative, Social, and Medical Study* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 56-69. Smallpox may have entered the Great Plains in other ways as well, for Cooper (p. 56) suggests that smallpox may have been affecting the lower Mississippi River valley in 1778. For other studies see Ann Ramenfosky, *Vectors of Death: The Archaeology of European Contact* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 130-3, and Jody Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns: The Case of the 1780-82 Smallpox Epidemic Among the Indians of Western Canada," *Native Studies Review* 4 (1988): 1-24.

Native raids in the history of the colony. Comanche, Apache, Pawnee, Wichita, and Osage warriors raided it relentlessly during the 1770s.[51] Juan Bautista de Anza had finally defeated one of the most prominent Comanche war leaders, "Cuerno Verde" in 1779.[52] Either in an attack or a peaceful encounter following the Comanche defeat in 1780, one or more of these Native groups contracted smallpox. Unbeknownst to the Spanish settlers, this touched off a pandemic that reached as far as the Chipewyan of the Hudson's Bay coast by 1783.

The northwestern plains may have been hit by a smallpox epidemic before 1780, but there is scant evidence of it. The horse and the frequent warfare that accompanied it almost certainly aided the spread of the disease. The epidemic spread northward along the important horse-diffusion routes between New Mexico and the northwestern plains and the Mandan-Hidatsa villages.[53] Native groups from the north frequently travelled to the Spanish settlements to trade for European goods and to raid horses. Once Natives had contracted the disease they were asymptomatic for ten to fourteen days — ample time for these highly mobile people to spread the disease a considerable distance.

The best evidence that helps date the arrival of the disease on the northwestern plains is William Walker's report at Hudson House dated 22 October 1781. On about that date, a Cree man who had recovered from the disease, arrived to tell Walker about the devastation it had wrought. By 11 December, William Tomison learned of it at Cumberland House.[54] Given this rate of dispersion, and the likelihood that the disease reached Hudson House from the southwest, the smallpox probably hit the northwestern plains in the spring or summer of 1781. There were no Euroamericans among the Shoshoni and Crow in 1781 but there is some evidence regarding the epidemic's effect on them.[55]

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[51] Hanson, "Spain on the Plains," 11.

[52] Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 465.

[53] Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 105-7. Ray discusses explains that smallpox spread to the northern plains via the Dakota of the Upper Mississippi River valley, but not the evidence that it also spread to the northwestern plains via Shoshoni.

The disease appears to have spread to the northeastern coalition from the Shoshoni when a combined war party of Cree, Assiniboine, and Blackfoot (possibly including Atsina) attacked a camp of dying Shoshoni, for in 1782 Matthew Cocking wrote that the

> Southern, Assinnee Poet, and the Yachithinue met with a tent of Kanasick Athinewock (i.e.) Snake Indians who were all ill of the Small Pox (and where supposed to have recieved [*sic*] from the Spaniards whom tis said those people trade with) killed them all and scalped them to carry away with them, by this means they received the infection and almost all of them died on their return, what few reached their own country communicated the disorder to their Friends and it spread through the whole country above here in some parts of which it still rages.[56]

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[54] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), Hudson House Journals, 22 October 1781; Cumberland House Journals, 11 December 1781. David Thompson, relying on accounts by Orcadian, Mitchell Oman, suggests that Oman had brought the news to Hudson House after he had been up river near the Eagle Hills where he had seen Indians recovering from the disease; Tyrrell, *Thompson's Narrative*, 320-1. The Hudson House Journals, however, indicate that Oman had left Hudson House on 15 October and had not returned until 2 December.

[55] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains,* 206. Also see James H. Bradley, "Journal of James H. Bradley," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* 2 (1896): 166.

[56] HBCA B.239/a/79 York Factory Post Journal 1782, folio 73d.

While the account of Young Man (Saukamappee) does not allow us to date the epidemic any more precisely, it provides one of the most powerful accounts of that epidemic. They caught the disease, apparently in the spring or early summer in the Red Deer or Bow River region:

> We caught it from the Snake Indians. Our Scouts were out for our security, when some returned and informed us of a considerable camp which was too large to attack and something was very suspicious about it; from a high knowl they had a good view of the camp, but saw none of the men hunting, or going about; there were a few Horses, but no one came to them, and a herd of Bisons [were] feeding close to the camp with other herds near. This somewhat alarmed us as a stratagem of War; and our Warriors thought this camp had a larger not far off; so that if this camp was attacked which was strong enough to offer a desperate resistance, the other would come to their assistance and overpower us as had been once done by them, and in which we lost many of our men.
>
> The council ordered the Scouts to return and go beyond this camp, and be sure there was no other. In the mean time we advanced our camp; The scouts returned and said no other tents were near, and the camp appeared in the same state as before. Our Scouts had been going too much about their camp and were seen, they expected what would follow, and all that could walk, as soon as night came on, went away. Next morning at the dawn of day, we attacked the Tents, and with our sharp flat daggers and knives, cut through the tents and entered for the fight; but our war whoop instantly stopt, our eyes were appalled with terror; there was no one to fight with but the dead and the dying, each a mass of corruption. We did not touch them, but left the tents, and held a council on what was to be done. We all thought the Bad Spirit had made himself master of the camp and destroyed them. It was agreed to take some of the best of the tents, and any other plunder that was clean and good, which we did, and also took away the few Horses they had, and returned to our camp.
>
> The second day after this dreadful disease broke out in our camp, and spread from one tent to another as if the Bad Spirit carried it. We had no belief that one Man could give it to another, any more than a wounded Man could give his wound to another. We did not suffer so much as those that were near the river, into which they rushed and died. We had only a little brook, and about one third of us died, but in some of the other camps there were tents in which every one died.[57]

Some have questioned whether Young Man was recounting the smallpox epidemic of

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[57] Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, 336-7.

1781-2 or an earlier epidemic from his youth. Given, however, that his description of the epidemic corresponds very closely to Matthew Cocking's, the latter seems unlikely. It is probable that the disease also spread to the northern plains via the Mandan and Hidatsa. The Mandan and Hidatsa were so devastated by the epidemic during the same years that the villages at Heart River and Knife River that numbered around 10,000 in 1780 were consolidated into much smaller villages at Knife River after the epidemic.[58]

The smallpox epidemic inevitably affected patterns of human interaction on the northwestern plains, partly, but not primarily because of its uneven patterns of mortality. It seems that all the indigenous groups on the northwestern plains were affected by the epidemic, but that very few of the Euroamerican fur traders contracted it. It is impossible to know how many of Natives of the northwestern plains died in the 1781 epidemic. For several reasons fur traders' estimates of the death rates among the Natives of the Saskatchewan River may not reflect averages on the northwestern plains. In fact, fur traders' reports suggest that the toll on the plains was generally lower than it was in the forests. After learning of the many deaths at Cumberland House, William Walker at Hudson House wrote that "there is a good few Indians alive Up here Yet."[59] The timing of the epidemic may account for a part of the difference. The epidemic clearly hit the northwestern plains before the winter months when danger of death by exposure and starvation was less. In contrast, the Natives of the Saskatchewan region suffered the disease during the colder months of what apparently was an exceptionally difficult winter. In January 1782, William Tomison wrote that at Cumberland House "I never see a greater scarcity amongst the Natives, then what has been this year." Complicating factors further, in the middle of the epidemic at Cumberland House the weather was very cold.[60] It is also difficult to estimate mortality because the most detailed initial reports were exaggerated. Afterwards, traders occasionally discovered that fewer Natives had died than they had first guessed. For example, Walker initially assumed that the entire Touchwood Hills Assiniboine had died but he later learned that they had not.[61] Probably, then, we can be no more precise than Young Man's estimate, quoted above, that the disease killed all members of some plains bands and a third of others.

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[58] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains,* 71. Wood and Thiessen estimate the 1804 population of the villages at Knife River at about 3750.

[59] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), William Walker (Hudson House) to William Tomison, (Cumberland House), 14 May 1782.

The uneven death rates among different bands, and the different mortality among Natives and Euroamericans requires some explanation. If the Natives of the northwestern plains had ever been exposed to smallpox before 1780, they appear to have had no memory of it. None of them could have acquired an immunity. The disease affected entire communities, young and old, at the same time, leaving no healthy members to care for the sick. Nomadic groups, unable to follow game or gather firewood and water, faced, not only the primary effects of the disease, but also a combination of starvation, exposure, and dehydration. These added significantly to the death toll. William Tomison explained how some bands, forced to move to find food, were compelled to abandon sick relatives to an almost certain death.[62] In sedentary Native communities elsewhere in North America, the crowded and unhygenic living conditions similarly boosted mortality. In most Euroamerican communities only a relatively small proportion of the population was struck with the disease at any one time. There were almost always immune caregivers who could nurse the ill to health. The ill did not have to worry about procuring the essentials. The sedentary lifestyle of Euroamericans, the stored food reserves, and the relief institutions were an advantage even in instances where an entire community was struck at the same time.

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[60] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), 11 January 1782.

[61] HBCA B.87/a/6, 4 January 1783.

Natives also died in very high numbers because, without any experience with the disease, their responses to the disease could be inappropriate. Europeans had been treating smallpox since it became established in Europe by the sixteenth century. During that period they experimented with and abandoned various treatments that only increased mortality.[63] For the Natives of the northwestern plains the adjustment to the disease occurred in 1780, and the treatments, were often as counterproductive as those of Europeans centuries before.

Given the incomplete information, it is impossible to speculate how the different death rates among certain bands and coalitions changed patterns of human interaction among the Native inhabitants of the region. The fact that the Euroamericans suffered virtually no losses, however, is important.

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[62] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), 21 January 1782, 25 January 1782.

[63] For example see Deborah Brunton, "Smallpox Inoculation and Demographic Trends in Eighteenth-Century Scotland," *Medical History* 36 (1992): 410-1.

In contrast to the Native inhabitants of the region who were decimated by the 1781 epidemic, few fur traders in the region even contracted it. Only one mixed-blood HBC employee is recorded as having contracted the disease, and he recovered. This tremendous difference in mortality prompted Tomison to muse that "there is something very malignant, that we are not sensible of, either in the Constitution of the Natives or in the Disorder, those that Die before the smallpox breaks out is tormented with great pains and many of them Die within 48 Hours."[64] This contrast, however, tends to conceal important similarities in the general susceptibility to, and mortality from, smallpox among Euroamericans and Natives. For example, the fact that not a single Euroamerican trader is known to have died of smallpox in the Saskatchewan basin in this epidemic conceals the fact that the smallpox reached its height in mortality in Europe in the eighteenth century.[65] The most conservative and recent estimates suggest that in the eighteenth century smallpox caused 10 percent of all deaths in Europe, and only the introduction of the cowpox vaccine in the nineteenth century significantly reduced this mortality.[66] The disease carried off men and women of all ranks of society from the meanest peasant to King Louis XV of France, who died of smallpox seven years before the epidemic hit the northwestern plains.[67] In contrast to the situation in North America, however, smallpox was endemic in large cities like London, and epidemics of the disease passed through rural English towns and countryside approximately every four or five years.[68] Smallpox in England in the eighteenth century, then, was a childhood disease, rarely striking people over the age of five.[69] This explains why none of the HBC's employees from England contracted the disease. The bulk of the HBC's inland employees in 1780, however, were from the Orkney Islands, off the northern coast of Scotland.[70] In the highlands of Scotland, and on the northern islands, smallpox could be absent for decades. When it did strike, the epidemic devastated entire communities.[71] It is not yet known whether there were epidemics in the Orkney Islands in the preceding decades that might have rendered the HBC employees immune to smallpox in 1780. Even, however, if Orcadians were not struck by such an epidemic, it is possible that much of the community was immune. The fact that the disease was more devastating in these communities than in London or even in rural England, and the fact that many people from these communities were seafarers, helps explain the fact that smallpox inoculation was accepted more quickly in the Orkney Islands than in major population centres.[72] In fact, the first recorded general inoculation for smallpox in Scotland occurred on the Orkney Islands in 1783, and the number of people inoculated in that campaign was low because inoculation had been extensive on the island even before that.[73] Indeed, although Lady Mary Wortely Montague, wife of the British ambassador to Turkey, is credited with popularizing inoculation among the elite of England after 1721, there is strong evidence that rural residents of Europe were practising inoculation before that.[74] Evidence of inoculation in Scotland dates as far back as 1715.[75] Thus, although the rate of inoculation in Scotland in the 1760s and 1770s is not known to have been high, it is known that the inoculation was practised in the Orkneys before 1783, and that inoculation was often performed by lay practitioners and even by parents on their own children,[76] suggests that the practice may have been more popular than records indicate. The documentation regarding the mortality of Canadian traders is much less complete but it suggests that Canadians were more likely to be affected by the disease. It is evident then, that

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[64] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), Cumberland House Journals, 2 February 1782 (p. 234).

[65] Donald R. Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants: Smallpox in History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 41; Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 199.

[66] Brunton, "Smallpox Inoculation," 404; Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, 199-200; William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), 250.

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[67] Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants*, 72. Hopkins argues that smallpox had a tremendous influence on the course of European history.

[68] S.R. Duncan, S. Scott, C.J. Duncan, "An Hypothesis for the Periodicity of Smallpox Epidemics as Revealed by Time Series Analysis," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 160 (1993): 231-48; S.R. Duncan, S. Scott, C.J. Duncan, "Smallpox Epidemics in Cities in Britain," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 25 (1994): 255-71.

[69] Duncan, Scott, Duncan, "An Hypothesis," 241-2.

[70] John Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC 1780-1821," in Judd and Ray, *Old Trails and New Directions*, 102-27.

[71] Michael Flinn, ed., *Scottish Population History: From the 17th Century to the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 291-2.

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[72] Brunton, "Smallpox Inoculation," 417. Brunton explains that Orcadians were particularly receptive to innoculation.

[73] Brunton, "Smallpox Inoculation," 412.

[74] Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants*, 46. Indeed, Hopkins explains (47) that the use of inoculation as a folk practise among illiterate people actually led to initial resistance to the practise among medical practitioners.

[75] Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants*, 46.

[76] Brunton, "Smallpox Inoculation," 414.

European adults on the northern plains were not biologically less susceptible to smallpox than Natives were; they, like most adults in Europe in the eighteenth century, had acquired immunity through contact with the disease as children.

After 1781, the Euroamerican fur trade expanded rapidly into the upper North Saskatchewan River basin. The devastation of the epidemic may have made the Natives of the northwestern plains more willing to welcome these traders to the region, but it is unlikely to have been a significant factor. Far more certain is the fact that the rapid expansion of the fur trade would have been impossible if the traders had lost experienced leaders in the same proportion as Native groups had.

We can never know the proportion of Natives killed by smallpox on the northwestern plains in 1781, but it clearly represented a major demographic collapse. Still, the demographic collapse represents only part of the significance of the epidemic. The 1781 epidemic must have so dramatically affected Native communities that most, if not all, bands on the northwestern plains did not continue to exist as autonomous communities. In the weeks and months following the epidemic, decimated bands, many of whom lost their most prominent leaders, must have merged with other bands, forming new communities. The documentary evidence does not describe this process among the Natives of the northwestern plains, although Larocque, in 1805 hinted at the change in living arrangements among the Crow when he wrote that "since the great decrease of their numbers they generally dwell all together, and flit at the same time as it is possible for them to live when together, they seldom part."[77] The change in band structures is well-described, however, for the Cree of the Saskatchewan River region where the documentation is more complete.[78] Thus, while the exact implications can never be known, it is safe to assume that the months following the epidemic witnessed the sudden amalgamation of formerly separate bands, and that the process was inevitably accompanied by social strains and instability. This process was probably as significant as demographic collapse itself.

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[77] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 206.

Certainly epidemics that killed at least a third of almost every band on the northern plains had ramifications beyond demographics. Calvin Martin's attempt to explain the implications of epidemics on Native world-views has few adherents today, but it remains one of the very few studies that deal with the question.[79] To grapple with this question, we must consider not only what portion of Native communities were killed in epidemics, but what role these victims had in their societies. Alfred Crosby has noted unsentimentally that, "when endemic diseases kill, they usually carry off the most expendable and easily replaced members of society, that is, immunologically inexperienced children."[80] Epidemic diseases kill differently. Native bands in 1781 lost a cross-section of their population. If anything, mortality among Natives, both in the northern forests, and on the plains was especially high among adult males.[81] For example, many of those leading Cree men of the Saskatchewan River basin that the HBC and NWC dealt with died in the epidemic. Every member of every band was mourning the loss of kin even as they coped with the effects of their own experience with the disease. Many carried disfiguring scars that constantly reminded survivors of the experience. If anything, Native societies suddenly lost a disproportionate number of their least expendable and least replaceable members during smallpox epidemics. The repercussions for the Native communities must have been great.

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[78] A discussion of this is central to Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree.*

[79] Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1978).

[80] Alfred W. Crosby, "Infectious Disease and the Demography of the Atlantic Peoples," *Journal of World History* 2 (1991): 130-1.

What then were the psychological, emotional, and spiritual effects of the smallpox epidemic? Unfortunately, the evidence is so scant that it can only suggest the enormity of the event. Still, this evidence should not be overlooked. About six years after the epidemic Young Man told David Thompson that

> When at length it [the smallpox] left us, and we moved about to find our people, it was no longer with the song and the dance; but with tears, shrieks, and howlings of despair for those who would never return to us. War was no longer thought of, and we had enough to do to hunt and make provision for our families, for in our sickness we had consumed all our dried provisions; but the Bison and Red Deer were also gone, we did not see one half of what was before, whither they had gone we could not tell, we believed the Good Spirit had forsaken us, and allowed the Bad Spirit to become our Master. What little we could spare we offered to the Bad Spirit to let us alone and go to our enemies. To the Good Spirit we offered feathers, branches of trees, and sweet smelling grass. Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people. To hunt for our families was our sole occupation and kill Beavers, Wolves and Foxes to trade our necessaries; and we thought of War no more, and perhaps would have made peace with them for they had suffered dreadfully as well as us and had left all this

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[81] William Walker noted that "the most part of them that has recover'd is women and children," Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, 279. Also see Tyrrell, *Thompson's Narrative*, 323.

> fine country of the Bow River to us.[82]

Young Man's poignant account hints at the far-reaching effects of the epidemic. Communities appear to have turned inward as they worried more about their day-to-day existence than their relations with outsiders. They turned from war to subsistence. Young Man suggests that the epidemic even shook the Blackfoot spiritually. David Thompson also described an incident told him by the Peigan after he saw the remains of the "One Pine":

> This had been a fine stately tree of two fathoms girth, growing among a patch of Aspins, and being all alone, without any other pines for more than a hundred miles, had been regarded with superstitious reverence. When the small pox came, a few tents of Peeagans were camping near it, in the distress of this sickness, the master of one of the tents applied his prayers to it, to save the lives of himself and family, burned sweet grass and offered upon its roots, three horses to be at it's service, all he had, the next day the furniture of his horses with his Bow and Quiver of Arrows, and the third morning, having nothing more, a Bowl of Water. The disease was now on himself and he had to lie down. Of his large family only himself, one of his wives, and a Boy survived. As soon as he acquired strength he took his horses, and all his other offerings from the "Pine Tree," then putting his Axe in his belt, he ascended the Pine Tree to about two thirds of it's height, and there cut if off, out of revenge for not having saved his family; when we passed the branches were withered and the tree going to decay.[83]

In another account of this story, Thompson mentioned that this man had said that this tree "had been planted by the evil spirit."[84] When Thompson met this man during the winter of 1787-8 he was "a good looking person with a deep settled melancholy upon his countenance." Young Man explained of the man that "after the loss of his family, he had taken no wife, lived alone in the tent of one of his brothers; that he had been several times with the war parties, never took a shield with him, always placed himself in the front of the battle as if he wished to die and yet none of the enemies arrows ever struck him."[85]

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[82] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 337-8.

[83] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 324. Peter Fidler also noted seeing "Nee tuck kis" in 1792, E. 3/2 "Journal of a Journey Over Land," 30 November 1792.

[84] Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 47. Young Man said that the idea that the good spirit had forsaken them and the evil spirit had destroyed them was prevalent among the Peigan, Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 49.

There is also clear evidence that details surrounding that the epidemic of 1781 were long preserved in the oral histories of those communities affected. In 1876 the Crow were able to provide James Bradley with a vivid account for he recorded, that

> Something less than a hundred years ago the Crows were living in two bands, the greater portion making their home upon the waters of the Powder River, while the smaller band of four hundred lodges, or about four thousand souls, were camped in the lower extremity of the Clark's Fork bottom, along the base of these bluffs. Here a terrible disease broke out among them, the victims being covered from head to foot with grievous sores. It proved fatal and destroyed almost the entire band. The plain was covered with the bodies of the dead, and their horses ran wild because there was no one to take care of them. The few who escaped the disease fled to the village in Powder River.[86]

With the death of such a large part of their populations, communities inevitably lost important repositories of community knowledge. David Thompson and other traders noted that Indians like Young Man found that both on the plains and in the forests, game was scarce following the epidemic.[87] This notion is supported by the Hudson House Journals. Bison were reported to be scarce there in 1782-3, a winter that was mild until

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[85] Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 47.

[86] Bradley, "Journal of James H. Bradley," 166. Note that this account supports the 1805 account from Larocque that the two bands of Crow amalgamated after the epidemic.

[87] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 323.

January, and then very severe.[88] The following year fur traders again reported shortages.[89] The scarcity, however, likely had as much to do with perceptions as with reality. If adult males were lost in disproportionate numbers, the ability of community members to predict the movements of game and to hunt them effectively, may well have been significantly diminished, resulting in perceived shortages.

Although there is no evidence that shows certain groups on the northwestern plains suffered greater mortality than others, certain groups do appear to have suffered more militarily. Since groups that suffered from the disease were unaware for a time that other groups would also be affected, they often withdrew from contested grounds. Thus, Young Man reported that after the epidemic of 1781 the Shoshoni "left all this fine country of the Bow River to us."[90]

The epidemic of 1781 roughly corresponds to the end of the Plains Kutenai. In 1811, Alexander Henry the Younger explained that he understood, probably from information given by Blackfoot or Cree informants, that the Kutenai, "being driven into the Mountains by the different tribes who inhabited the Country to the Eastward of them, and with whom they were perpetually at War, they in their turn waged War upon their harmless neighbours to the Westward, the Snare Indians, and soon drove them away from off the Lands the Kootonaes now inhabit, which is the upper part of the Kootonaes or

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[88] HBCA B.87/a/6, William Tomison (Hudson House) to George Hudson (Cumberland House) 9 February 1783.

[89] HBCA B.49/a/14 (Hudson House Post Journals within the Cumberland House Journals), 16 March 1784.

[90] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 338.

Columbia River."[91] The Kutenai continued to travel to the plains seasonally to hunt bison, but it seems that none of them resided east of the Rocky Mountains afterward. The attacks of their enemies were likely the central cause of the Kutenai withdrawal, but it is also likely that the smallpox epidemic was important.[92]

Thus, in some ways the epidemic worked to weaken the position of the Shoshoni and their neighbours on the northwestern plains. The Blackfoot and their neighbours, in contrast, were strengthened. On the Saskatchewan River the price traders were willing to pay for provisions appears to have gone up, at least temporarily.[93]

The epidemic of 1781 left every Native community on the Great Plains reeling. Never has such a large portion of the population of the plains faced such tumultuous emotions. Never have so many communities simultaneously faced such a multitude of challenges. The epidemic also affected relations within and among societies. Euroamerican traders, largely unscathed, continued their expansion westward unabated. Meanwhile, every Native band in the region probably lost important leaders, adopted new members, or joined other bands. Bands of the southern coalition, who were already vulnerable to attack from their more powerful neighbours, withdrew towards the southwest. Although the bands of the northeastern coalition faced many of the same devastation as their enemies, their military and territorial position actually improved as a result of the epidemic. Even Young Man, however, opined that his people would be forever changed by the experience. Neither Young Man's people, nor any of the other bands on the northwestern plains would enjoy a period of peace and quiet during which they could adjust to the new realities, for they were on the brink of a new period of turbulent change.

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[91] Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 522.

[92] Schaeffer, "Plains Kutenai," 9.

[93] HBCA B.87/a/6 21 October 1782.

Chapter Seven
"Many Broils and Animosities": 1782-1795

> The Crees being the most powerful clan in this quarter, have been involved in frequent quarrels with the Gros Ventres for many years past, but as they mutually feared each other their hostilities amounted only to the death of a few of either party, when they occasionally met at the Fort, 'till summer — 93.
>
> Duncan M'Gillivray, 8 March 1795.[1]

> This morning a Band of about 30 Blood Indians and 10 Black feet arrived ... They all confirm the former rumours that the *Gros Ventres* are separated in Two Bands, one of which consisting of 90 lodges direct their course towards this quarter, and the other have formed an alliance with the *Snake Indians*, — a tribe who inhabit the Rocky Mountains, unacquainted with the productions of Europe, and strangers to those who convey them to this Country. The Snake Indians have suffered a severe loss in War this year if rumour be true, a party of the two first mentioned tribes having killed no less than 25 men and two Women in a recent expedition against them.
>
> Duncan M'Gillivray, 9 April 1795.[2]

It is no mere coincidence that the years following the arrival of Euroamerican fur traders on the northern plains were tumultuous ones for the region's Native inhabitants and for the fur traders themselves, for the arrival of Euroamericans brought new opportunities and challenges to every band in the region. For the Crow, Shoshoni, Kutenai, and Flathead, to a greater or lesser degree, the increasing power of their northern neighbours threatened their very access to the northwestern plains. Meanwhile, in the Saskatchewan River basin the northeastern coalition began to dissolve. As bands there considered the possibilities offered them and limitations imposed upon them by the expansion of the fur trade, a new alignment of bands began to develop. Certain bands, chiefly Cree and Assiniboine, maintained their privileged access to European goods. The bonds of amity between these privileged Native bands and other plains bands, however, were inexorably weakened by the dissolution of the mutually beneficial relationship that linked them for at least two generations. Gradually, irritants mounted while the ability and will to suppress them waned. The type of antagonistic incidents that might have been forborne, tolerated, and assuaged in earlier years began to cultivate animosity, jealousy, and resentment. Occasional raids escalated into skirmishes, skirmishes into battles, and battles into full-scale warfare. For the Blackfoot and Sarcee, friendships with Cree and Assiniboine bands deteriorated but did not dissolve before 1794, but it required remarkable forbearance and diplomacy to preserve any sense of common ground beyond that year. For the Atsina the period witnessed the conclusive end to any friendly relations with the Cree and Assiniboine, and an increasing orientation towards the southwestern bands. The result was warfare in the Saskatchewan River basin on a scale perhaps never before experienced. With little ability to stem the tide of bitterness, Euroamerican fur traders tried to act as peacemakers as they continued to compete among themselves, naively believing that they would not become embroiled in the hostilities themselves. They were wrong. The fur traders did, however, well understand that even when they became embroiled in Native hostilities they were not at the centre of the battle; they were mere pawns in a deadly battle in which there could be no neutrality.

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[1] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 62.

[2] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 69.

Fur Trade Expansion on the Northwestern Plains

The Euroamerican competition for the furs of the northwestern interior of North America continued unabated between 1782 and 1794, although the HBC held its ground against the Canadian concerns only in the Saskatchewan River basin. Farther north, Canadians undertook significant exploration and a dramatic expansion of the fur trade. Alexander

Mackenzie, for example, reached the mouth of the Mackenzie River in 1789 and became the first Euroamerican to cross the continent of North America in 1793.[3] The explorations facilitated the expansion of the fur trade into the vast subarctic forests of the Athabasca. The peace between the British and the United States helped accelerate a process already begun with the outbreak of hostilities in 1774. The troubles with the American colonies had convinced many involved in the fur trade of the southwest to direct their energies towards the northwest. It was in this way that men such as Peter Pond, Peter Pangman, and Alexander Henry came to the northwest. Still, during the 1780s the trade of Lake Michigan and the Mississippi was twice the size of the northwestern trade.[4] In the 1780s however, the uncertainties in the United States, hostilities with Natives in that country, the exhaustion of the fur resources of the southwestern trade, and the tremendous profits of the northwestern trade drew many more traders toward the northwestern interior. Excluded from the NWC, Gregory, McLeod and Company waged a bitter and violent struggle with that company between 1783 and 1787. The exploits of the HBC were much more modest in these years. The HBC solved its transportation problems by 1780 just as Britain entered several decades of almost continuous warfare. The demands of the British military ensured that the HBC faced a chronic manpower shortage for decades. Still, on the Saskatchewan River, the HBC nearly kept pace with the North West Company (NWC) which increasingly dominated the

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[3] Mackenzie is the subject of a recent biography. See Barry Gough, *First Across the Continent: Sir Alexander Mackenzie* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

[4] W. S. Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, (Toronto: Champlain Society), 7.

Montreal trade.

As the traders expanded their operations in the subarctic forests, they continued to require provisions from the plains but their goal of acquiring beaver furs remained paramount. The North Saskatchewan River, which flowed primarily through the parkland region along the northern margins of the plains and was convenient to trapping bands of the northern forests, was therefore ideal, and most fur trade posts were constructed on that river rather than on the South Saskatchewan (South Branch) River (Figure 7.1). Thus, the fur traders limited their operations to the very northern margins of the northwestern plains. On the North Saskatchewan River competing concerns constructed posts near one another, sometimes within a single palisade. They did so in order that, in their contest for furs, they could keep a constant watch on each other. They also did so in order that they could make common cause should Native bands threaten them. For further protection, they also inevitably constructed posts on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River or on an island so that plains bands were encouraged to camp on the south side of the river and send trading parties across the river, either on horseback or on boats with the help of traders, to reach the posts.[5]

Ruthless competition among Canadian concerns, especially before the merger of the NWC and Gregory, McLeod, and Company in 1787, continued to impel fur traders inland. In the summer of 1785 Canadian traders, who now apparently numbered almost

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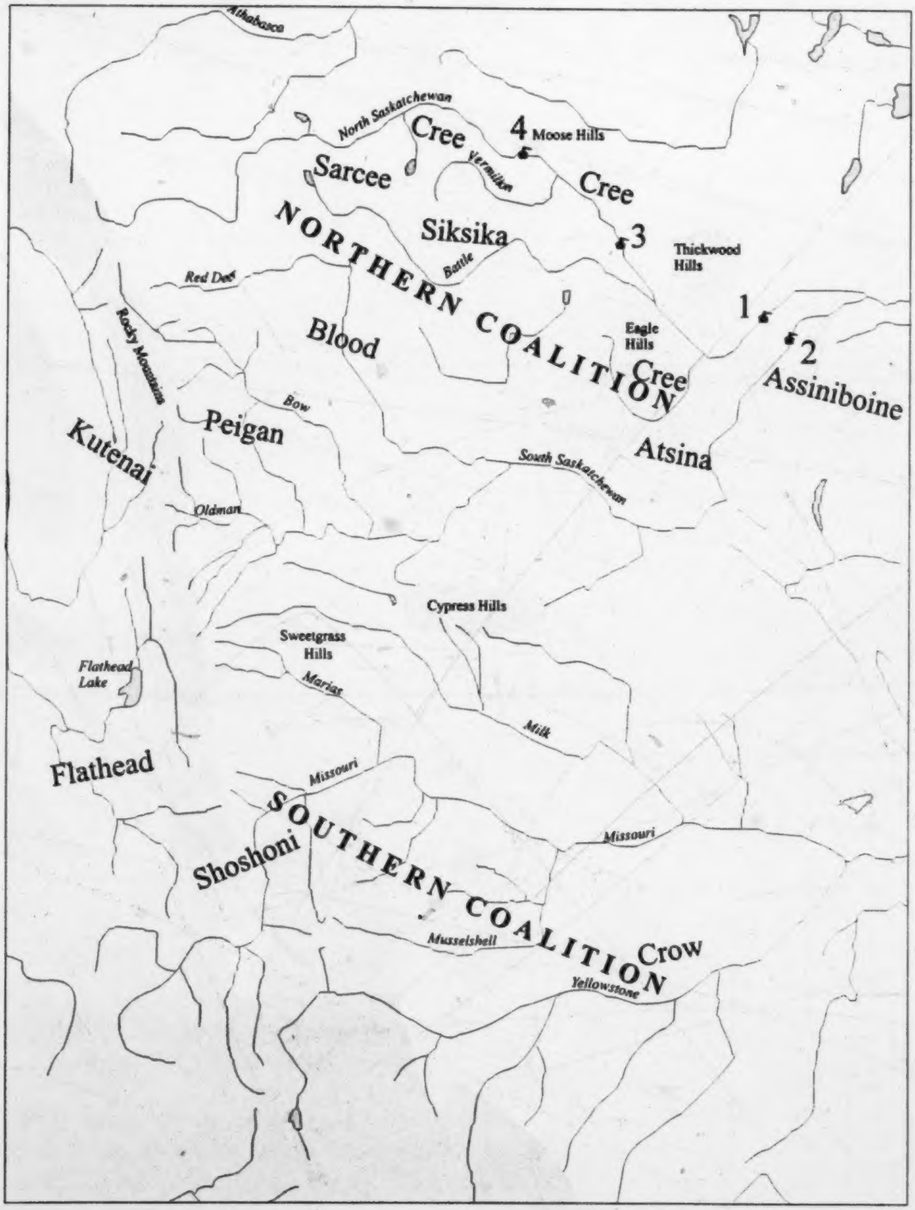
[5] Of course from November to April ice made the river irrelevant but winter was usually a less turbulent period than summer.

Figure 7.1
Location of Euroamerican Trading Centres and Native Groups, 1782-1794.


Athabasca
North Saskatchewan
Cree
4 Moose Hills
Sarcee
Vermilion
Cree
NORTHERN COALITION
Siksika
3
Thickwood Hills
Battle
Red Deer
Rocky Mountains
1
2
Eagle Hills
Blood
Cree
Assiniboine
Bow
Kutenai
Peigan
Atsina
South Saskatchewan
Oldman
Cypress Hills
Sweetgrass Hills
Flathead Lake
Marias
Milk
Flathead
Missouri
SOUTHERN COALITION
Shoshoni
Missouri
Crow
Musselshell
Yellowstone

1. Hudson Houses (Upper and Lower)	1778-1788
2. South Branch Houses	1785-1794
3. Manchester House/Pine Island Fort (Fort de l'Isle)	1785-1794
4. Buckingham House/Fort George	1792-1801

two hundred, established a post at the Battle River near the Eagle Hills.[6] The HBC could not respond that year but the following year a Canadian, Donald Mackay, invited William Walker at Hudson House to join him in establishing posts about sixty miles beyond the Battle River at a location recommended by Cree or Assiniboine leaders there.[7] Their posts were not to be alone. Mackay and Walker were joined by Peter Pangman (Gregory, McLeod & Co.) and William Holmes (NWC) at what is known as the Pine Island/Manchester House complex.[8] Thus, in the fall of 1786 there were four competing posts at Pine Island, and two others, including Edward Umfreville's, thirty to forty miles upstream, and another at the Battle River. William Tomison complained that the Natives "has nothing to do but go from house to house, get Drunk and beg Goods on Expectation of what they are to bring."[9]

The two main Canadian firms also established South Branch House about forty miles up the South Saskatchewan River in 1785. In the autumn of 1786 the HBC built its South Branch House at the same location. They built the post to replace Hudson House, which they abandoned as a permanent establishment that year. Meanwhile, in 1785, the NWC established Pine Fort near the old French Fort la Reine on the Assiniboine River. This post was the launching site for trade with the Mandan and Hidatsa villages two hundred miles to the southwest.[10]

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[6] HBCA B.87/a/7, 7 August 1785; HBCA B.49/a/16, William Tomison (Hudson House) to William Walker (Cumberland House), 11 January 1786 (fo. 22); HBCA B.121/a/1, 2 November 1786.

[7] HBCA B.87/a/9, 17 August 1786; HBCA B.87/a/9, William Tomison (Pine Island) to William Walker (Hudson House), 14 November 1786. Mackay would have welcomed the HBC presence there because he would have hoped that their presence would reduce the chances of other Canadian concerns establishing there. The Canadian traders did not regard the HBC as their primary competition in these years.

[8] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 11n.

[9] HBCA B.87/a/9, William Tomison (Pine Island) to William Walker (Hudson House), 14 November 1786. Mention of Umfreville's House is in B.121/a/1.

After the amalgamation of the NWC with Gregory, McLeod and Company in 1787, the competition for the furs of the Saskatchewan River basin was increasingly a struggle between the reorganized NWC and the HBC. Between 1787 and 1795, the NWC enjoyed tremendously prosperity.[11] In 1789, Angus Shaw of the NWC travelled about six days above Manchester House to establish another post, but the HBC seemed unable to respond.[12] In the spring and autumn of 1792, however, the NWC and HBC built Fort George and Buckingham House respectively at the Moose Hills.[13]

The Era of Direct Trade Begins

The establishment of Hudson House in 1778 had brought the fur trade establishments within reach of the Atsina, Sarcee, and Blackfoot bands, but the era of regular direct trade really began after 1782. Once Manchester House and Buckingham House were established, the Atsina, Blackfoot, and Sarcee ceased visiting Hudson House.

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[10] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 26.

[11] Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 16.

[12] B.121/a/4, 22 October 1789. B.121/a/4, William Walker (Manchester House) to Mitchell Oman (South Branch House) 11 December 1789. The HBC was apparently unable to respond because of a shortage of Brazil tobacco. In 1791 the HBC did not build higher up because many of their horses were stolen, HBCA B.121/a/6, William Tomison (Manchester House) to William Walker (South Branch House) 22 February 1792.

[13] HBCA B.121/a/8, 5 June and 7 October 1792.

Although the Atsina must have met Euroamerican traders well before the 1770s, these visits were restricted to contacts brokered by Cree or Assiniboine intermediaries. Reflecting their limited knowledge of the various plains bands, Euroamerican observers made little distinction between the Atsina and the Blackfoot before the 1780s. The Atsina and Blackfoot (and others) were all included in the Cree term *Archithinue* until Matthew Cocking specifically identified a band of "Powestick Athinnewock or Water-fall Indians" in 1772.[14] The first record of direct Atsina trade at Euroamerican fur trade posts occurred when two tents of Atsina visited Hudson House in November 1779,[15] but substantial direct trade began only after 1782.

Direct Blackfoot trade with Euroamericans also appears to have begun before 1782 but it was not regular until after that year. None of the HBC men appears to have understood the Blackfoot language until the mid 1780s. Not surprisingly, the easternmost Blackfoot groups established trading relations first. When nine Siksika men visited Hudson House in 1782 most went to the NWC post, leading William Tomison to explain that "we are greatly at a Loss of not knowing the language of this tribe as also the fall Indians, and indeed never will, without Men goes, and lives with them for some Years, as that is the way that the Canadians have acquired the Language."[16] A large band of

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[14] HBCA B.239/a/69, 1 December 1772.

[15] Rich, *Cumberland House Journals*, (1952), 11 November 1779, Hudson House, 28 February 1780

[16] HBCA B.87/a/6, 1 December 1782. Even in 1785 Robert Longmoor complained that none of his men at Hudson House knew the language of the Blackfoot, B.87/a/7, 25 June 1785.

"Earchithinnues" and some Sarcee did visit the HBC at Hudson House together in 1783.[17] The establishment of direct trade, and the anticipation of further trade as the fur trade expanded, led William Tomison to send envoys to the Blackfoot groups. In May 1784 William Tomison "fitted out James Gaddy & sent him away with the Picanau & Blood Indians, to learn the Language[.] [T]he Indian that I have sent him in care of talks the Southern Tongue well; as also Blackfoot; & seems to be a *good sort of a Man.* I have also sent Isaac Batt to meet the Blackfoot Indians & endeavour to bring them in with Provisions in the Sumr."[18] These visits soon became more frequent. By the autumn of 1786 Batt and Gaddy were among four people who Longmoor sent from the newly established Manchester House to winter with the Peigan.[19] In 1787 David Thompson was one of eight men sent to the Peigan, while another six went to the Blood.[20] The Peigan may have been the last of the Blackfoot to establish trading relations with the fur traders — evidently there were still Peigan leaders who were visiting fur trade posts for their first time in 1794 — but the traders quickly particularly sought the Peigan trade.[21] This is because the Peigan were the only Blackfoot group to bring substantial numbers of beaver furs to trade, although they shot them during the open water seasons when their fur was not as valuable. Even then, some refused to hunt, or even touch, beavers, for personal religious reasons.[22]

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[17] HBCA B. 49/a/14, 29 November 1783 and 6 December 1783 (Hudson House Post Journals for this year are contained in this Cumberland House Post Journal). Further visits occurred in 1784, HBCA B. 49/a/15. In 1783 Tomison noted the arrival of some Siksika and Blood "some of which never has been into any Settlement before," HBCA B.87/a/6, 4 May 1783.

[18] HBCA B.49/a/15, 15 May 1784 (fo. 65d) emphasis in the original. Perhaps, then, Gaddy was hosted by Young Man and his band.

[19] HBCA B.121/a/1, 21 October 1786.

[20] HBCA B.121/a/2, 9 October 1787.

[21] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 41.

The Sarcee appear to have begun visiting Hudson House in 1783 when Tomison recorded the arrival of a tent of "Sussuwich," "Sussu" or "Pelican Indians" that "talk a different Language from either fall or blackfoot Indians."[23] Their travelling to this post was risky however. After leaving the post this small group of Sarcee met a larger band of Cree or Assiniboine that forced them to give up some of what they had acquired at Hudson House.[24] In 1786 the HBC sent its first envoy to live with the Sarcee for a winter.[25] Based on his experiences that ended in 1788 Umfreville said that the Sarcee "now harbour in some country about the Stony Mountain, where they keep to themselves, for not many have as yet appeared at any of the trading houses."[26]

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[22] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 27 November 1792. Grace Morgan has argued that northern plains Natives had an ancient aversion to beaver hunting; R. Grace Morgan, "Beaver Ecology/Beaver Mythology." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1991. Her discussion of the importance of the place of the beaver in Blackfoot mythology (34-5), and the importance of the beaver in maintaining surface water sources (59-61) is intriguing. The HBCA journals, however, do make it clear that the Peigan did kill many beaver but that their relatively sedentary lifestyle in winter precluded large-scale beaver hunting.

[23] HBCA B.87/a/6, 1 and 3 March 1783.

[24] HBCA B.87/a/6, 23 March 1783.

[25] This envoy was James Tate, HBCA B.87/a/9, William Tomison (Pine Island) to William Walker (Hudson House), 14 November 1786.

[26] Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 198.

Hudson House was evidently outside the territory of every "Archithinue" band on the northwestern plains, for the Blackfoot ceased visiting that site after 1785 when the Canadian traders established operations at the Battle River near the Eagle Hills.[27] Hudson House thereafter became a Cree and Assiniboine post. South Branch House, Hudson House's replacement was also overwhelmingly a Cree and Assiniboine post. After Manchester House and Pine Island were established, the Archithinue traders preferred trading there. During those posts' first years the Blood and Peigan provided the bulk of the furs traded at Manchester House.[28] The Sarcee also visited Manchester House frequently in the 1787-8 season. When the Buckingham House/Fort George complex was built, some Atsina and Siksika traders continued to visit Manchester House, but the bulk of the Blackfoot and Sarcee began trading at the more convenient Moose Hills posts. Assiniboine and Cree bands also resorted to the Moose Hills post however.

While in most regions of the northwestern interior of North America the HBC remained a minor player in the fur trade at this time, it appeared to be capturing a growing portion of the plains trade during the 1780s. This was in part because Canadian traders placed less value on the trade of the plains than of other regions, but it is also because the aggressive tactics of the Canadians were ineffective with the plains bands. Even into the 1790s the NWC had more Blackfoot interpreters than the HBC, but it seemed unable to use this advantage to attract customers. In 1787 William Tomison noted that a party of Atsina had been unsatisfied with their treatment at Peter Pangman's post and that the traders there had "locked them up within their Gates so that they could not get out without being overhauled."[29] In 1788 William Tomison noted that "there has been 7 Canadians tenting with them [the Peigan] all winter and only got 1 man to go with them to their House."[30]

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[27] HBCA B.87/a/7, 7 August 1785; HBCA B.49/a/16, William Tomison (Hudson House) to William Walker (Cumberland House), 11 January 1786 (fo. 22); HBCA B.121/a/1, 2 November 1786.

[28] HBCA B.121/a/2, William Tomison (Manchester House) to William Walker (South Branch House), 26 December 1787 (fo. 68d).

For other groups on the northwestern plains the 1790s marks their first direct contact with Euroamericans, but access to Saskatchewan River posts remained impossible. In the fall of 1792, while some Shoshoni and Kutenai emissaries were visiting Sakatow's Peigan band to negotiate peace agreements, they met HBC trader, Peter Fidler, the first Euroamerican these people had ever met. There, near the Bow River, the Peigan displayed their European goods and presented some of them to the Shoshoni, but there was evidently no trade.[31] The Kutenai were scarcely better supplied. During the same December Fidler explained that the Kutenai had never visited fur trade posts, "altho they much wish it — But the muddy river, Blood, Black Foot, & southern Indians always prevents them — they wishing to monopolize all their skins to themselves — which they do giving the Poor Indians only a meere trifle for — they scarce give them as much for 10 skins as they can get for one at the Trading Settlements."[32] Fidler himself had scant opportunity to trade with the Kutenai, for the Peigan "began to barter for horses as soon as we arrived & soon brought all the Cottonahaws had to spare — for a mere trifle some only giving an old Hatchet."[33] Eager for these goods (which did not include guns), the Kutenai traded every horse they had, making it necessary for their women to carry all their possessions on their backs.[34] The Kutenai were unable to break the blockade of the northeastern coalition. At Fort George on 22 February 1795 Duncan M'Gillivray reported that "the Coutonées have already made several attempts to visit us, but they have been always obstructed by their enemies and forced to relinquish their design with loss."[35] Thus, into the 1790s, the Kutenai, Shoshoni, Flathead, and Crow, remained utterly dependent upon the parsimonious Blackfoot and on other tenuous sources of European goods.

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[29] HBCA B.121/a/2, 21 November 1787.

[30] HBCA B.121/a/2, 25 March 1788. For a similar incident see HBCA B.87/a/8, 13 April 1786.

[31] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 12 December 1792

Further Domination of the Northeastern Coalition

Manchester House and Buckingham House, established as they were on the very fringes of Blackfoot territory, greatly facilitated the spread of European goods to the plains Indians. The volume and range of goods available increased, and the price that the fur traders demanded for new items was a fraction of the cost Cree and Assiniboine intermediaries had asked in earlier years. While the Blackfoot had formerly acquired used guns from Cree and Assiniboine intermediaries at a rate of 50 MB, Duncan M'Gillivray noted that the Blackfoot acquired them for 14 MB at the Saskatchewan River posts in 1794.[36]

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[32] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 31 December 1792.

[33] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 30 & 31 December 1792.

[34] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 1 January 1793.

[35] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 56.

The flow of European goods to the Crow, Shoshoni, Flathead, and Kutenai also must have increased modestly in these years. Fortunately for them, they had other sources besides the Blackfoot. The establishment of Pine Fort on the Assiniboine River in 1785 significantly increased the flow of European goods to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages, and it is likely some of these goods entered the Crow trading system.[37] Still, the diffusion of guns and ammunition to the Crow was insignificant compared with the flow of weaponry to the northwestern plains from the Saskatchewan River posts. Indeed, even in the 1790s, the Crow may have depended as much on the flow of guns northward from New Mexico as they did on guns flowing west from the Missouri villages. When a combined Peigan and Shoshoni party attacked a party of Crow in 1793, two Spanish guns were among the spoils.[38] In New Mexico, the Spanish remained indifferent to the fur trade. Edward Umfreville noted that he had seen Spanish horses, brands, and goods among the Blackfoot, but that a Shoshoni slave woman among the Blackfoot had informed him that "it is not peltry that they [the Spanish] come principally in quest of."[39] In 1786 the Comanche, reeling from military losses and losses because of smallpox, became more peaceful with the Spanish. The peaceful relations encouraged Comancheros, Spanish traders, to travel and trade in parts of the southern Great Plains and Great Basin, spreading Spanish goods into the northern plains.[40] To seal their peace the Spanish, between 1786 and 1804 distributed over 18,000 pesos worth of European goods, including guns, to the Comanche, and these goods would have spread across the plains in trade and warfare.[41] Still, the northern Shoshoni bands must have acquired only a very few of these guns.

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[36] Williams, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 257; Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 30. Alexander Henry the Elder noted that guns were sold at Nipawi in 1775-6 for twenty beaver skins, Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, 320.

[37] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 70.

[38] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 14 February 1793.

Compared with the Blackfoot and Cree, the southern coalition of bands was clearly very poorly armed in the 1780s and 1790s. The fact that Edward Umfreville who was on the Saskatchewan from 1784 to 1788 described Blackfoot shields of "drest leather, which are impenetrable to the force of arrows," but were useless against guns, suggests that the Crow and Shoshoni rarely used firearms in warfare.[42] Even in 1793 Peter Fidler described the Peigan practising war games with bow and arrows and shields — suggesting that their adversaries still relied on those weapons.[43] When he met a band of Kutenai on the plains in late 1792, Fidler noted that they were equipped with stone arrowheads, hatchets made of deer horns, and wedges of stone.[44] And weaponry continued to make the decisive difference in warfare on the northwestern plains. David Thompson, after explaining that when shown an awl, a strong needle, or European fire-making tools, Natives would gladly give fine pelts to get them, further opined that "Iron heads for their arrows are in great request but above all Guns and ammunition." This Thompson explained, was because "a war party reckons its chance of victory to depend more on the number of guns they have than on the number of men."[45]

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[39] Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay,* 178.

[40] Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West," 355.

[41] Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 185; Thomas Kavanagh, personal communication, 7 February 1997.

[42] Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay,* 188-9

[43] HBCA E. 3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 28 February 1793.

Not surprisingly, the northeastern coalition continued to capitalize on the advantages of its military superiority. Any hiatus in warfare between the Peigan and Shoshoni after the smallpox epidemic of 1781 lasted, by Young Man's account, only two or three years. Young Man explained that it was a group of "Snake" who resumed the continual warfare two or three years after the epidemic by killing a small party of Peigan that had travelled to the Rocky Mountains to hunt.[46] The frequency with which warfare is mentioned in HBC journals in the 1780s and 1790s suggests how common it became. For example, a Blood party at Manchester House in 1787 traded 18 guns and 4 pistols and announced that they were going to war against the Snake.[47] According to Umfreville, who left the country in the spring of 1788, all the Natives of the Saskatchewan River region commonly went to war against the Snake. He asserted that it was common for the Blackfoot to trade their slaves to the Canadians who brought them to Canada.[48] It may be that in these years that the Blackfoot began routinely waging warfare in both summer and winter. For over two months ending in January 1787 Kootenay Appee led an expedition to the south, finding no enemies "but the Black People (the name they give to the Spaniards)[*sic*] from whom they had taken a great many horses and mules."[49] In March 1788 some Peigan visited Manchester House boasting that "a number of them has been to war and have killed 13 Snake Indians and are all going to war again this Summer."[50]

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[44] Nevertheless, Fidler was impressed by the effectiveness of these tools for felling a tree, HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 31 Decmber 1792.

[45] Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 45. Also see p. 51.

[46] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 338.

[47] HBCA B.121/a/1, 11 March 1787.

The warfare continued to be a mismatch. Because of the relentless warfare during the 1780s the Blackfoot, particularly the Peigan, dominated an increasingly large region at least as far as the Oldman River basin.[51] James Gaddy after an extended visit with the Peigan returned to Hudson House in April 1786 with a report that suggested that warfare between the Peigan and Shoshoni, at least into the Bow River basin, was continuous:

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[48] Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 177. Based on passages like this, Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains*, argues that there was a significant trade in human captives between Native groups and Euroamericans. The trade in human slaves on the northern plains, however, must have been small. Nevertheless, Canadian traders did acquire slaves of various ethnic groups from the Blackfoot. Most of these slaves appear to have become permanent residents of NWC posts, perhaps in hopes that they could facilitate future NWC contacts with these ethnic groups. For example, when David Thompson unsuccessfully attempted to cross the mountains to meet the Kutenai in 1801, he took with him "an old Kootenay woman who many years ago had been taken prisoner, and had since mostly resided with the Canadians in the company's settlements"; Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 226.

[49] Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 50. The Blackfoot undoubtedly frequently had horses with Spanish brands, bridles, and saddles, in these years, but, despite Thompson's belief, it is unlikely that they actually encountered the Spanish directly. Two months would not be sufficient for a raiding party to reach the Spanish settlements and return. The horses were probably raided from the Utes, who several plains Native groups called "Black People"; Frederick Webb Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (Grosse Pointe, Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1912 [rept. 1968]), II: 876.

[50] HBCA B.121/a2, 25 March 1788.

> James Gaddy informs me where he has been is a very Plentiful country of all sorts of Animals common in the country Beaver & wolves especially, he says that to his Knowledge 14 odd Beaver has been taken out of one House. He also says that the Pee,kne,now Indian tribe is much the largest of any he has seen being 250 tents in number, these with the Blood & Blackfoot tribes go constantly to War against the snake indian tribe and many is killed on both sides, at times the former take numbers of Horses & mules from the Latter which is the reason of their going to war he says they travelled about 150 miles along the Rocky mountain but saw no end to it.[52]

By 1792 Blackfoot raids were taking them well south of the Missouri River.[53] While Blackfoot bands may not have hunted much in the Missouri drainage at this time, Blackfoot warriors ensured that the Shoshoni and Crow bands rarely ventured north of the Missouri. The Kutenai certainly were no longer permanent residents on the northwestern plains. Clearly, during the 1780s, the Blackfoot were confident of their military superiority over their southern neighbours and were eager to take advantage of this superiority to augment their horse herds, and use ever larger areas of the northwestern plains.

At a time when the northeastern coalition bands dominated their enemies so thoroughly, they even used their very unequal trading relations to complement their warfare. In June and November 1792 some Shoshoni and Kutenai sued the Peigan for peace.[54] The Peigan confidently accepted the peace overtures at least in part for the opportunity that a temporary peace gave them to convince their enemies of the vast military superiority they enjoyed. In December 1792 three Shoshoni emissaries visited large Peigan encampments near the Highwood River. One visited Sakatow's band on 12 December 1792. The Peigan ordered the Euroamericans among them to wear their Sunday best, "that we might cut a more respectable appearance to the Snake Indian." Then, while in the presence of the Shoshoni man, the Peigan "showed us by far the most civility & attention we ever experienced from them the whole year." The Peigan aims seemed well accomplished for Peter Fidler reported that "the Snake Indian viewed us from head to foot & from foot to head — with the greatest attention felt at our skin in places and expressed great astonishment at us — particularly at our having a different coloured hair from any Indian." When the men agreed to smoke together, Fidler perceived an opportunity to endear himself to his hosts by advancing their cause:

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[51] HBCA B.121/a/2, 10 February 1788.

[52] HBCA B.87/a/8, 13 April 1786. The following year Gaddy and Thompson travelled with the Peigan four days journey farther south, (HBCA B.121/a/2, 10 February 1788) but Thompson's journal makes it clear that they were not with the frontier band that winter, Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 50.

[53] HBCA E. 3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 21 February 1793.

> as the day happened to be clear — I lighted it [a pipe] with a burning Glass that was fixed in the top of my Tobacco [*sic*] box — he eyed me all the time with the most circumspect attention but when he saw the pipe smoake — by means of the Glass — he jumped up & wished to be farther from me — as he thought I was something more than common, to light a pipe without fire — & the Indians we was with took good care not to let this good opportunity slip, to extol us in a very high manner to him & they told the poor fellow such unaccountable stories relating to our conjurations that was very ridiculous — but magnifying us in his Eyes.

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[54] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 15 & 22 November 1792, 12 December 1792.

The Peigan also insisted that Peter Fidler display his astronomical equipment, which the Peigan explained, was used to predict future events.[55] The Peigan also displayed the goods they acquired at the fur trade posts and gave the Shoshoni envoy some samples as presents.

Undeniably impressed by their visit to the Peigan, the Shoshoni men then brought several Peigan back to the Shoshoni camp about a fifteen day walk to the south. There, well south of the Missouri River, the Peigan guests were well treated by their Shoshoni hosts and, upon their departure about six weeks later, were given fine horses that allowed them to make the return journey in a mere eight days.[56] Other Peigan and Blood men also visited the Shoshoni that winter, and the Shoshoni, seizing on the fact that the Blood and Peigan men were well armed, induced them to participate in attacks on the Crow. For example, seventeen Blood men participated in a Shoshoni attack on a Crow band that left thirty-two Crow men dead.[57] During the same winter five Peigan men joined a Shoshoni party on a far less successful raid. Except for a Peigan man killed by a well-aimed Crow arrow, there were no injuries.[58] Thus we find, in contrast to the prevailing patterns at the time, Blood, Peigan, and Shoshoni warriors waging war together against the Crow. Further complicating the picture, even as these Blood and Peigan men were visiting Shoshoni bands, other Blood and Peigan parties were raiding horses from the Shoshoni.[59]

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[55] All the passages quoted in this paragraph are found in HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 12 December 1792. The Peigan themselves apparently believed that Fidler's astronomical instruments enabled him to spy on their enemies, see HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 17 January 1793.

[56] HBCA E. 3/2 "Journal of a Journey Over Land," 31 January 1793. This meant that the Shoshoni camp was well south of the Missouri River, for the Missouri River was only a ten days's walk, (or about five days on horseback), from Spitcheyee, Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 224.

[57] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 14 February 1793.

[58] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 2 March 1793.

The Fracture of the Fragile Coalition

It is clear, then, that between 1782 and 1794 western Cree, Assiniboine, Blackfoot, and Atsina bands on the northern plains continued to use their easy access to Euroamerican goods to force the retreat of the southwestern bands. The fact that they shared their vulnerability tended to lead the diverse southwestern bands to make common cause. At the same time the very fact that Blackfoot bands could now deal directly with Europeans, the fact that many western Cree bands had adopted a plains existence that included a role as provisioners for the Euroamerican traders, and the fact that horses remained chronically unevenly distributed among Native groups, undermined the friendships among the equally diverse bands of the Saskatchewan River region. It was only after 1782, however, that the forces unleashed by the arrival of Europeans bore fruit.

Evidence of Blood and Peigan cooperation in warfare with the Shoshoni and of Peigan trade with Kutenai bands in the 1790s illustrates how complex interaction among Native groups on the Great Plains was. Indeed, patterns of interaction among bands on the Great Plains cannot be adequately understood unless it is assumed that raiding and skirmishes frequently occurred among generally peaceful plains Indian bands, just as episodes of peaceful trade and cooperation punctuated warfare between generally hostile bands.[60] Facile classifications of "allies" and "enemies" are completely inadequate in this regard. Relationships between and among bands, even bands of the same ethnic group, ranged along a continuum between close and persistent affiliation and inveterate and continuous enmity. When conflicting bands were of the same ethnic group, the impetus to reconcile differences after acrimonious incidents was great. Similarly, if two bands of differing ethnic groups were linked in a pattern of mutual reliance, the urge to soothe differences was also great. If one band clearly had military advantages over the other, it had the greater freedom to take advantage of its neighbours, and the weaker band was compelled to tolerate abuses.

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[59] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 29 & 30 December 1792.

Clearly, trade and military cooperation occurred among generally hostile bands. Conversely, hostile incidents frequently occurred on the northern plains, even when groups lived in general amity. For many years patterns of symbiosis acted to ensure that occasional raids, even skirmishes involving deliberate killings, were tolerated and appeased among bands of the northeastern coalition. As the more powerful partners, Cree and Assiniboine bands had greater liberty to exploit and offend than the Atsina and Blackfoot did, but the relationships generally exhibited goodwill.

It is in part because of the nature of diplomacy on the plains that the arrival of Euroamerican traders on the northwestern plains was so significant. The arrival of

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[60] Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War," *passim*, but particularly, 108. Albers's description of this phenomenon is the best available. During the winter of 1775-6 Alexander Henry the Elder noted that the "Black-feet" were troublesome neighbours to the Assiniboine and that small Assiniboine bands had reason to fear the Cree, Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, 303, 318. This, however, was a time of generally cordial relations among these groups.

European goods and of Euroamericans themselves are two very different phenomena. The arrival and spread of European goods encouraged the pattern of symbiosis that existed between 1730 and the 1770s. After the arrival of Europeans these patterns of interdependence dissolved.[61] The development of the provisions trade and the establishment of direct trade between Europeans and various plains bands, ended the mutually beneficial relationship between various Cree and Assiniboine bands and Blackfoot and Atsina bands even as it increased the power of Cree and Assiniboine bands compared with the Blackfoot and Atsina bands.

Compared with the privileged position of the Cree and Assiniboine, the Blackfoot and Atsina always held only a peripheral role in the fur trade. For many goods, services, and furs, Euroamerican fur traders depended upon Cree and Assiniboine bands with whom they had already forged relationships. In contrast, "the *Gens du large* consisting of Blackfeet, Gros Ventres, Blood Indians, Piedgans &c. are treated with less liberality, their commodities being cheifly Horses, Wolves, Fat & Pounded meat which are not sought after with such eagerness as the Beaver."[62] Indeed, trading companies found it difficult to profit from the influx of wolf skins that accompanied the beginning of direct trade with the "*Gens du large*." The profits made from wolf skins dropped significantly in the 1780s. Accordingly, in 1789 the HBC changed its standard for wolf furs down from to 2

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[61] Albers describes this general pattern on the Great Plains in her "Symbiosis, Merger, and War."

[62] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 31.

MB per pelt to its older standard of 1 MB.[63] Plains bands clearly resented the change.[64] A Peigan band that hosted James Gaddy in the winter of 1789-90 was perturbed to learn of the change when it arrived at Manchester House in the spring of 1790. Thomas Stayner noted that "these Indians are exceeding [*sic*] hard to deal with, the reducing the Standard of Wolves from two to one Beaver, will I fear injure this Trade much, as the Master has it not in his power that Encouragement, for those Skins, which was formerly given."[65]

As the Blackfoot and Atsina position in the fur trade actually declined compared with the Cree and Assiniboine in the 1780s the Archithinue were increasingly outgunned by the Cree and Assiniboine bands that the fur traders continued to favour.[66] Had they been able to maintain relationships of inter-reliance, they may have maintained their generally cordial relations. These relationships, however, had evaporated. Only their traditional friendships and kinship ties encouraged continued amity. For the Blackfoot, these ties seem to have been enough to overcome antagonisms for several more years, but the deterioration in relations was evident already in the 1780s. Frequent horse raids were the most important source of acrimony throughout the equestrian period.

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[63] The change was actually ordered in 1788 (HBCA A. 6/11, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 16 May 1788), but it was impossible for the orders to be transmitted inland that autumn, HBCA A. 11/117, 8 September 1789 (fo. 39).

[64] HBCA B.121/a/4, 13 and 16 March 1790; B.121/a/5, 8 December 1789 and 15 March 1790.

[65] HBCA B.121/a/5, 15 March 1790.

[66] Duncan M'Gillivray described the Cree as "the most powerful clan in this quarter" in 1794, Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 62.

Historically, two factors influenced the distribution of horses on the Great Plains. The first factor, only important before the 1780s, was the rate of diffusion from the source in New Mexico. Between 1780 and 1800 however, the density of horse populations across the interior of North America roughly stabilized. Groups that were rich in horses by that time tended to remain rich in horses, while those poor in horses remained poor. After 1780 the distribution of horses had less to do with diffusion from source than with environmental factors that limited the population of horses. Horses became most plentiful on the southern plains, among the Kiowa, Apache, Comanche, and Osage, and in the Columbian plateau, among the Interior Salishan groups, including the Flathead.[67] Groups on the western plains were generally richer in horses than those on the eastern plains. The severity and length of winters and the depth of snow appear to have been the most important factors in determining the density of horses across the plains and west of the Rocky.[68] Horses are far less well adapted to cold climates than are bison; thus the gradient in the density of horse populations was steep. On and near the northwestern plains the Flathead, Shoshoni, and Crow consistently had the largest horse herds. Among the Blackfoot the Peigan had the largest horse herds, and the Siksika the smallest.[69] Other groups, such as the Atsina and Sarsi had still fewer horses. Finally, the Plains Cree and Assiniboine had fewer horses than almost every other group on the Great Plains.[70]

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[67] Alan J. Osburn, "Ecological Aspects of Equestrian Adaptations in Aboriginal North America," *American Anthropologist*, 85 (1983): 566, 580.

[68] This is convincingly shown in Osburn, "Ecological Aspects of Equestrian Adaptations."

[69] Fidler mentioned "a great number of horses" among the Peigan in HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 18 November 1792.

Alan Osburn has explained that domestic horse herds demand the expenditure of considerable time and energy if they are to be maintained.[71] Naturally, as more severe environments posed greater demands upon horse owners in terms of horse care, the costs for the owners became increasingly onerous, especially when viewed in terms of the risk that horses would escape, be stolen, or succumb to severe weather. These horses were not pets; they were beasts of burden. Winter use was very hard on them. When horses grew weak during severe winters Natives often tried to rest them by relying more heavily on dogs, but nomadic hunters had only limited abilities to give their horses the rest, food, shelter, and protection from predators that were often necessary. When they conflicted, the interests of the human community generally took precedence over those of the horses.[72] Consequently, domestic horse herds may have been more prone to winter kill than were feral herds. Given these constraints, groups in areas where a high horse mortality was almost inevitable were far more likely to raid their enemies for horses than expend the energy needed to maintain and augment horse herds through careful husbandry and breeding. The Cree and Assiniboine, indeed, had little success in horse breeding and did not put much effort into horse husbandry.[73]

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[70] Rinn has argued that the 0° F January isotherm represents the limit of equestrian culture. This would put the Cree and Assiniboine horse herds in a very tenuous position. Indeed, evidence suggests that their herds had to be replenished continuously through raiding. Rinn, "The Acquisition, Diffusion and Distribution of the European Horse," 83. Still, thanks to their horse raids the Assiniboine of the Swan River district did not want for horses in the winter of 1801, Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 4 January 1801.

[71] Osburn, "Ecological Aspects of Equestrian Adaptations," 583.

[72] On areas of the northeastern plains, winter use of horses was so inevitably to cause the death of horse herds that they were simply released at the beginning of the winter to survive as best they could, and collected again in late winter, Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, 312, 296.

Because of the environmental factors limiting the density of horse population, and because of the primary importance of horses to the security of any plains group, it was natural that groups that had fewer horses than their neighbours were likely to raid their neighbours for their supply. This tendency was most pronounced where the gradient in density was the highest or where horses herds could not be maintained without inordinate effort.[74] This was clearly the case on the northwestern plains. Fur traders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries repeatedly noted that the Plains Cree and Plains Assiniboine bands were the most notorious horse raiders on the northern plains. Unable to maintain their herds naturally, these groups had to acquire their horses from their neighbours. As long as they acquired horses from the Blackfoot and Atsina by trading, or got them from the abundant herds of their southwestern enemies in combined raids with the Blackfoot, their raids against the Blackfoot, Atsina, and the fur traders were relatively rare. Once the Blackfoot established regular direct trade with Euroamericans early in the 1780s, however, Cree and Assiniboine bands had little to exchange with the Blackfoot.

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[73] Rinn, "The Acquisition, Diffusion and Distribution of the European Horse," 78-80. Peter Fidler explained in 1793 that the Blackfoot groups were "very careful" of their horses but "the Southern Inds pays very little attention to them — & frequently they have none." HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 9 January 1793; Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, 312, 296.

[74] Osburn, "Ecological Aspects of Equestrian Adaptations," 584.

They could and did, of course, continue participating in joint expeditions against the Shoshoni and Crow, but they also relied more heavily upon horse raids against the Blackfoot, Atsina, and the fur traders. Gradually and almost inevitably, the relationship among these bands soured. Edward Umfreville described the process in 1790: "Many broils and animosities among the natives, originate from a desire of being in possession of these animals. One party generally commences hostilities by stealing horses of their adversaries, and they in turn retaliate; so that at length a mutual resentment takes place, and war becomes absolutely necessary."[75]

Cree and Assiniboine raids on fur traders' horses began in the late 1780s when a series of bitter winters decimated the horse herds of the northwestern plains. Because they lived in settled establishments, committed considerable effort in gathering hay and sheltering horses, and had greater opportunity to rest weakened horses, the fur traders could maintain horses herds in environments where Native bands could not. Not surprisingly then, fur trade posts became targets of repeated raids. Cree and Assiniboine bands, particularly those from the Swan River region of the northeastern plains (where horse mortality was the highest) travelled considerable distances to raid horses from the Natives and Euroamericans of the northwestern plains. In contrast, although horses were "their principal inducement in going to war," especially before the 1820s, the Blackfoot rarely raided the herds of fur traders or Cree and Assiniboine bands except in retaliation.[76] Their primary sources were in the much more abundant horses owned by their enemies, the Crow, Shoshoni, and Flathead.

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[75] Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 189.

[76] Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 200.

Acrimonious incidents in the Saskatchewan River region became much more frequent in the late 1780s, suggesting that it was in those years that the broad coalition of Blackfoot, Atsina, Cree and Assiniboine bands was under stress. In May 1786 Canadian traders Peter Pangman and William Holmes came down to Hudson House and mentioned trouble among the Indians. The "Pee,ken,now" had killed one Cree and wounded another near the Eagle Hills.[77] During the following summer William Tomison grew concerned about the increasing tensions among the Natives of that area.[78] In July, some Cree of the upper Saskatchewan apparently attacked and killed some Blood and Sarcee forcing the Cree band to flee downstream to the South Branch House area for fear of retaliation. The arrival of Blood bands at Manchester House for the rest of the summer sparked considerable anxiety and HBC traders feared that Blood and Peigan bands would not dare travel to Manchester House during the coming winter.[79] Then, in August, a Peigan band, almost certainly Young Man's band, arrived. Manchester House journals reveal that "their chief business is to make it up between the blood Indians and Crees and Sussew Indians to be at peace and all to come to the Houses as before."[80] Young Man's connections with the Cree bands made him particularly well suited to mediate in this case. Still, other Blood and Peigan bands remained reluctant to visit Manchester House that winter.[81] In fact, increased tensions over the next year convinced William Tomison to abandon Manchester House for the summer of 1788.[82] There is no evidence, however, of further violence between the Blackfoot and the Cree in the late 1780s and early 1790s. This suggests that the relationship between them improved again. On 28 January 1792 William Tomison noted that a tent of Blood Indians was camping at Manchester House "to wait the arrival of some Nehethewea [Cree] Indians to know whether they are to keep peace with them or not."[83] During the winter of 1792-3 small Cree parties were camping, often with Peigan bands, in the Red Deer valley,[84] and even south of the Bow Valley.[85] In the spring of 1795 Duncan M'Gillivray noted the arrival of a large party of Sarcee, Cree, Piegan, and Blood at Fort George and complained that "the Crees are quite pitiful this Spring having amused themselves during the Winter with smoking & feasting along with

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[77] HBCA B.87/a/8, 5 May 1786.

[78] HBCA B.121/a, William Tomison (Manchester House) to William Walker (South Branch House), 26 December 1787 (fo. 68d); HBCA B.49/a/19.

[79] HBCA B.121/a/2, 9 July 1787.

[80] HBCA B.121/a/2, 24 August 1787. The following day's entry, in which Gaddy is left word how to find this band in the fall, makes it clear that the band was familiar with James Gaddy. On 9 October Gaddy and David Thompson did, in fact, begin their journey that would take them to Young Man's camp. The account of this journey is contained in

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Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 46-51.

[81] HBCA B.205/a/2, William Tomison (Manchester House) to William Walker (South Branch House), 16 March 1788.

[82] William Tomison (Hudson House) to George Hudson (Cumberland House), 13 May 1788.

[83] HBCA B.121/a/7, 28 January 1792.

[84] HBCA E. 3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 16 November 1792.

[85] It was clear, however, that it was unusual for a Cree band to travel as far south as the Bow River, HBCA E. 3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 9 January 1793. Also see HBCA E. 3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 11 November 1792.

the Piegans"[86] Did the relatively mild and snow free winters of the early 1790s help ease relations between the Blackfoot and the Cree and Assiniboine? It is impossible to know, but the evidence is suggestive.

The relationships between Cree bands and Blackfoot bands were in flux in the 1780s, but it is not clear what course the Sarcee were taking in those years. References to the Cree fleeing Manchester House for fear of the Sarcee and Blood in 1787 (already discussed) are juxtaposed in the historical documents with Umfreville's report of an attack by a Sarcee band upon a Blood band "last summer" (probably meaning the summer of 1788 or 1787). According to Umfreville, the Sarcee in the late 1780s maintained "a close alliance with the Nehethaway rather to profit by their protection, than for any mutual esteem."[87] It is possible that the Sarcee bands in these years were divided in their allegiances. In early 1788 the Sarcee fought a significant battle among themselves. Although the reasons for the fighting are unclear, at least four men were killed and several more injured. The conflict led some Sarcee to flee their kin and camp with some Cree bands.[88] Sarcee appear to have been camping with Cree for some years thereafter.[89] Other Sarcee, however, were associated with Blackfoot groups in the 1790s. A party of

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[86] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 74-5.

[87] Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 199.

[88] HBCA B.121/a/2, 13, 16, and 17 April 1788.

[89] A reference to a combined Cree and Sarcee trading party as late as 2 May 1792, HBCA B.121/a/7. Also see HBCA B.121/a/6, 27 January 1792. They appear to be prolific trappers.

Piegan-Sarcee, for example, arrived at Fort George in 1794.[90] The easing of tensions in the 1790s probably allowed the Sarcee to maintain cordial relations with Blackfoot and Cree bands.

As relations among bands in the Saskatchewan River basin deteriorated, the behaviour of plains bands at fur trade posts also changed. The change in behaviour was probably caused, at least in part, by the greater familiarity of these bands with the Euroamerican newcomers. As Native traders grew familiar with the Euroamerican traders and their ways, their initial admiration was quickly diminished.[91] The change in behaviour, however, was also directly related to the changing relationships among Native bands. Although they worked to reconcile differences among bands, traders remained closely associated with Cree and Assiniboine bands. This is not surprising. The traders had been familiar with Cree and Assiniboine bands for many years. The Cree and Assiniboine were the most dependable suppliers of furs and services. By the 1780s kinship, friendship, and trading ties between Cree communities and fur traders were well established. The Blackfoot and Atsina never had the same access to European goods or confidences as did the Cree, and as relations began deteriorating and the military superiority of the Cree and Assiniboine consequently became more important, Blackfoot and Atsina resentment of fur traders became natural. Not surprisingly then, during the 1780s members of the Blackfoot, Atsina, and Sarcee became increasingly aggressive at fur trade posts.[92] Until the mid 1780s the Peigan and Blood had a very positive reputation among the traders.[93] In the late 1780s this changed. In the summer of 1789 Tomison left an unusually large number of traders at Manchester House because "the Indians are much more daring then [*sic*] they used to be."[94] That autumn Thomas Stayner described an incident in which a Siksika man, unsatisfied with trade terms, entered the master's room at Manchester House with a gun. The incident was defused without violence, but hinted at the increasing tensions.[95] In the summer of 1791 Isaac Batt unwisely agreed to go with a Blood camp that was little known to the traders and who had run away with women belonging to other Blackfoot men. Batt was murdered for the horses, guns, and other articles he took with him.[96] In 1793 a group of Blood came and, being unsatisfied with the trade terms, simply left.[97] The fur trader's opinion of the Sarcee also soured in these years. It was at Manchester House during the late 1780s that the Sarcee began to earn a reputation among fur traders as difficult traders.[98] By 1789 what would become a common refrain, "I never saw such hard dealers since I have been in the Country" could be found in HBC journals.[99]

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[90] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 40.

[91] Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," *passim*, but especially 12.

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[92] This is the time when traders begin their frequent mentions that men were employed "attending the House" to prevent theft of trade goods while plains Indian bands were at the posts. See for example, HBCA B.121/a/2, 28 February and 25 March 1788.

[93] HBCA B.121/a/1, 9 & 10 April 1787. Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 201.

[94] HBCA B.121/a/3 17 May 1789.

[95] HBCA B.121/a/5, 12 December 1789.

[96] HBCA B.121/a/7, 3 October 1791. That these were Blood is mentioned in HBCA B.205/a/6, 18 September 1791.

[97] HBCA B.24/a/1, William Tomison (Buckingham House) to James Tate (Manchester House), 30 January 1793 (fo. 45). Also see HBCA B.24/a/3, 8 July 1793.

[98] HBCA B.121/a/2, 7 January 1788.

"A Peaceable People Till Now"

The period between 1782 and 1794 must certainly have been the most tragic in the history of the Atsina. For them the period must have begun with great optimism. An increasingly wide range of European goods were available to them at lower costs. They enjoyed generally cordial relations with their immediate neighbours and huge military superiority over their enemies. Fifteen years later, however, their situation was much different. For them the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1782 was only the dramatic prelude to decades of hardship.

It is evident that the Atsina and Blackfoot were closely associated in the period before 1780 and would be afterwards. Even in the twentieth century the Atsina have often been included with the Sarcee in the "Blackfoot Confederacy." Nevertheless, the Blackfoot and Atsina were distinct ethnic groups who spoke mutually *un*intelligible Algonquian languages. The unique opportunities and challenges that the two groups faced in the 1770s and 1780s led their paths to diverge. Located east of the Blackfoot, the Atsina felt the consequences of Euroamerican expansion earlier and more intensely than the Blackfoot did. The Atsina, unlike the Blackfoot, had kin a considerable distance to the south. The documentary evidence for Atsina-Arapaho interaction dates from the first years of the nineteenth century but there can be little doubt that interaction occurred long before that, perhaps continually since their separation. The relationship meant that the Atsina were much more oriented towards and familiar with the region south of the Missouri than were the Blackfoot. Maps drawn by Siksika and Atsina leaders in 1801 and 1802 make this clear.[100] On the map drawn by Old Swan in 1801 all the landforms south of the Missouri River are identified by their Atsina names rather than their Siksika names. A map drawn by an Atsina informant depicts a region extending as far south as New Mexico, much farther south than any of the Siksika maps. It shows the location of several Arapaho-Atsina bands well south of the northwestern plains. The unique opportunities and challenges they faced affected Atsina behaviour and prospects significantly in the 1780s and 1790s.

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[99] HBCA B.121/a/4, 9 December 1789. Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay*, characterized the Atsina as "given to theft and intoxication" 199.

The Atsina and Blackfoot held only a peripheral role in the fur trade before 1806, but the challenges for the Atsina were more acute than they were for the Blackfoot. The Atsina lands had few of the fur bearing animals the Euroamericans valued most highly. Because the Atsina were a relatively small group with a peripheral place in the trade, the fur traders did not even attempt to learn their language.[101] Thus, Atsina access to European goods was less secure than that of the Blackfoot. Furthermore, located outside the chinook belt, Atsina horse herds were more vulnerable to winter kill than were the herds of the Blackfoot. Located near powerful Cree and Assiniboine bands, their herds were more subject to raids than were the herds of the Blackfoot. More dependent on wolves than the Blackfoot, the Atsina felt the effects of the HBC reduction in its trade standard on wolf furs more acutely than it did the Blackfoot. As the Atsina's ability to secure European goods diminished and their relationship with their well-armed Cree and Assiniboine neighbours deteriorated, their military position began increasingly to resemble that of the Shoshoni and Crow. In a desperate effort to defend themselves, the Atsina in 1793 and 1794 felt compelled to attack Euroamerican fur trade posts themselves. Their efforts only incited greater hostility and the 1790s witnessed the beginnings of the gradual withdrawal of the Atsina towards the south.

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[100] See the Appendix entitled "Blackfoot and Atsina Maps, 1801."

[101] The Atsina and fur traders generally communicated in Blackfoot, Umfreville, *Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 198.

The reduction in the HBC standard on wolf furs in 1789 could not have come at a worse time for the Atsina, for it reinforced the impression that the Euroamerican fur traders were firm allies of the Cree and Assiniboine bands. By the late 1780s the relationship between local Cree and Assiniboine bands with the Atsina had become very unfriendly. Because the Cree and Assiniboine bands had superior access to posts, the locations of which had been decided largely by those bands; and because they had access to a wider range of valuable fur bearing animals and could also profit by provisioning the fur traders, the Cree and Assiniboine were much better armed than the Atsina.

While they clearly benefitted from their access to Euroamerican goods, the Atsina were at a disadvantage when compared to the Cree and Assiniboine. This would not have been a serious problem if relations had remained friendly. They had not. The increasing orientation of Cree groups to the plains, and the resulting raids on Atsina horses, led to an early division.

The basis for cordial relations — mutually beneficial trading relations and dangerous mutual enemies — had disappeared by the 1780s. There was little now to discourage the Cree and Assiniboine bands from augmenting their own herds by raiding Atsina herds. By 1787 tensions between the Atsina and Cree and Assiniboine bands were evidently high but it appears that it was in 1788 that all peaceful relations between those groups ended.

After a cold, snowy winter and during the unusually cool spring of 1788, a small band of Atsina was nearing posts at the Eagle Hills when they were attacked by a band of about ten tents of Cree from the lower South Saskatchewan River area who "fell upon them and killed the leading man, after which they cut off his arms, head, Private Parts and took out his bowels and then took what furrs [*sic*] they had untraded from them," which the Cree then "traded with [the?] impudent villains of Canada."[102] The troubles prompted the HBC to abandon Manchester House for the summer of 1788.[103] Because of the tensions, even at South Branch House William Walker found it difficult to keep his Cree hunter in the area during the summer.[104] During the summer more "great disturbances" including an incident that left five Atsina and one Cree dead led the Cree of the region to flee down river and into the forests and the Atsina to flee to the south, probably to visit their Arapaho kin.[105] The Atsina did not return to the posts for two years.

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[102] HBCA B.121/a/2, 1 May 1788, 26 April 1788. For evidence of the cool spring, see HBCA B.121/a/a, fo. 61d which says that the North Saskatchewan River at Manchester House did not break up until 28 April.

[103] HBCA B.121/a/2, 2 May 1788.

[104] HBCA B.205/a/3, 24 July 1788.

The stress caused by the severe winters of the later 1780s contributed to increased conflict. The winter of 1787-88 was a difficult one, and a major snowfall on 23 October 1788 at Manchester House area heralded the beginning of another severe winter. By the end of November, Natives complained that the unusually deep snow made horse travel impossible.[106] As early as late January William Tomison noted that "Indians from different quarters" told him that "the Snow is so very deep which has starved the greatest part of their horses to death, and what is alive cannot travel."[107] In January and February Sarcee, Cree, Blood, and Siksika complained that the severe winter had decimated their horse herds.[108] Unfortunately, spring also arrived late in 1787. On 16 May William Tomison noted that "it has been one of the coldest Springs I ever knew, not one night as yet without a strong frost."[109] The weather took its toll on the horses and the bison. As he travelled near the forks of the Saskatchewan that spring Tomison noted "many grizzled, brown, and black Bears today feeding along the Shores on drownded [*sic*] Buffalo, of which their [*sic*] is great Numbers."[110] The winter of 1789-90 was much milder but spring was even more delayed. The North Saskatchewan River at Manchester House did not break up until 11 May 1790.[111] By 1790 the horse herds of all the bands in the Saskatchewan basin must have been depleted but the Cree and Assiniboine herds would have been most affected. The inducement for raiding the herds of neighbouring bands must have been great.

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[105] HBCA B.121/a/3, 11 September 1788; HBCA B.205/a/3, William Walker (South Branch House) to William Tomison (ascending the Saskatchewan River) 12 September 1788.

[106] HBCA B.121/a/3, 23 October and 29 November 1788.

[107] HBCA B.121/a/3, William Tomison (Manchester House) to William Walker (South Branch House) 25 January 1789 (59d).

[108] HBCA B.121/a/3, 22 January, 16 February 1789. The Peigan did not come in until spring because of the snow, 25 April 1789. In late April two Indians visited South Branch House to borrow a horse "their own dying through the badness of the winter," HBCA B.205/a/3, 24 April 1789.

[109] HBCA B.121/a/3, 16 May 1789.

If hostilities disrupted the lives of Cree and Assiniboine bands in the Saskatchewan River forks region, they affected the lives of the Atsina to a far greater degree. After the warfare of 1788 the Atsina avoided the Saskatchewan River region. Finally, on 12 May 1790 William Walker noted the arrival of "a Great Tribe" of Atsina with a large trade in furs. Walker explained that "these Indians has been off from any of these Settlements these 2 Years through some Differences that happened between them and the Southward Indians."[112]

In contrast to previous winters the first three winters of the 1790s were unusually warm and snowless. Perhaps the mild winters ameliorated the situation for the hard-pressed Atsina, for the tenor of HBC journals suggest that tensions at the posts abated. In 1792 the NWC and HBC built new establishments near the Moose Hills. The new

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[110] HBCA B.121/a/3, 24 May 1789. Also see HBCA B.121/a/4, 6 June 1789.

[111] HBCA B.121/a/4, 11 May 1790; 24 May 1790. This is two or three weeks later than it usually broke up at Manchester House in those years.

[112] HBCA B.121/a/4, 12 May 1790.

Buckingham House/Fort George posts served local Cree and Assiniboine bands and became the favoured site for the Peigan, Blood, Sarcee, and some Siksika while local Cree and Assiniboine bands, some Siksika and the Atsina continued to trade at Manchester House/Pine Island House. Indeed, visits of Atsina at Manchester House were very common in the winter of 1792-3. Nevertheless, if hostilities abated between 1790 and 1793, they resumed with renewed intensity thereafter. In the summer of 1793 a small band of about sixteen lodges of Atsina encamped near the South Saskatchewan River was discovered by a party of Cree bands from the lower Saskatchewan River and Swan River regions "with a Band of Stone Indians fell on them ... and killed 2 of their old Men & 150 Women & Children afterwards fled into the Woods."[113] These Cree bands then fled to the Swan River region and traded at posts there for the winter for fear of retaliation, not returning to the Saskatchewan until the spring.[114]

Duncan M'Gillivray rightly regarded the 1793 attack as a dramatic turning point in Cree-Atsina relations. Although he noted the "frequent quarrels" before that date, he believed that it was the first high-casualty warfare between the two groups. The Atsina, however, had few options. The Cree had such military superiority that the Atsina had little chance of success against them. Furthermore, after hostilities broke out Cree bands easily retreated into the forests with which the Atsina were unfamiliar.[115]

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[113] The quote is from HBCA B.24/a/2, 22 October 1793. Other information regarding this attack was drawn from Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 62-3.

[114] HBCA B.205/a/8, 14 March 1794.

[115] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 63.

Clearly the fur traders sensed that their situation had become dangerous again by the summer of 1793, but they evidently did not expect to become targets themselves. In this they were sorely mistaken, for, as Duncan M'Gillivray observed in hindsight, "the Gros Ventres being intimidated from attempting any speedy revenge upon the Crees, formed the design of attacking us, whom they considered as the allies of their enemies."[116] During the summer and autumn, Siksika bands that traded at Buckingham house were very aggressive toward the traders.[117] Then, during the unusually cold and snowy October of 1793, a Cree killed a Siksika at Buckingham House after a quarrel, leading the Siksika to flee.[118] The dangerous situation led the HBC and NWC to agree to abandon their South Branch Houses for the winter of 1793-4 until William Tomison, who had a very acrimonious relationship with the NWC men, scuttled the deal.[119] Once again, however, even the HBC post's Cree hunter at South Branch House could barely be convinced to stay in the vicinity.[120] None of this, however, appears to have prepared William Tomison and other fur traders for the news of a combined Atsina-Blackfoot pillaging of Manchester House in October 1793.

The Atsina and Siksika attacked Manchester House and Pine Island House with the goal of securing as many European goods as they could carry, and destroying what they could not without injuring Euroamerican fur traders themselves. Representatives of a combined Atsina and Siksika party arrived at the post for gifts of tobacco, a usual routine that signified their impending arrival to trade their summer hunts. Three days later, between 5 and 15 October, the band consisting of about forty men, arrived on the south side of the river. Post personnel crossed them over on boats as was usual. If the Atsina had intended to kill fur traders, they let their best chance pass. Instead they began the normal routine of trading their furs at the posts. Only then did they perceive that only two traders were present at the HBC's Manchester House and they spontaneously began to take advantage of the situation by pillaging the post and roughing up the men. They also apparently occupied most of the NWC fort and began plundering that post until the NWC men took to arms and forced the attackers to flee with some trade goods, about twenty horses, and two women of the post. Repulsed by the Canadian traders, the attackers returned to the less well fortified HBC post

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[116] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 63.

[117] HBCA B.24/a/2, 8 July and 11 October 1793.

[118] HBCA B.24/a/2, 12 October 1793.

[119] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, xxxiv.

[120] HBCA B.205/a/8, James Bird (South Branch House) to William Tomison (Manchester House), October 1793 (fo. 30d).

> and threaten'd the two men that if they did not immediately leave the House they would shoot them, they ransacted [*sic*] the house in every part, and carried away what they were in need of. All the Liquor they carri'd to the outer Gates & destroy'd it, and did not take or drink a drop of it, the loss is estimat'd at 3000 MBeaver belong [*sic*] to the Company besides the Men left all their own property. They went again to the Canadians house robb'd the Men of every thing they had — the Masters apartments being defend'd by their Men prevented their further progress, just as they had plunder'd the Mens house our People from up the River return'd in the Boats, which the Indians immediately secured and made a precipitate retreat across the River, where a Canadian fired and killed one of them."[121]

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[121] HBCA B.135/a/82, George Sutherland to John Thomas, 18 February 1795 (fo. 57).

None of the fur traders was killed.[122] Evidently, more Native attackers subsequently died of wounds received at the hands of the Canadians.

At South Branch House James Bird greeted the news with incredulity. He expressed his "astonishment on hearing of a House being plundered by a People, I thought, the most rational and inoffensive in this part of the Country."[123] If Bird's surprise seems unwarranted, it is probably explained by the traditionally amicable relations that the Company had had with all the Native bands of the region, including the Atsina. Until 1793 traders remained remarkably complacent about the warfare that had flared up in the Saskatchewan River region. Even after the attack on Manchester House, however, Tomison understood that the traders themselves were not the main targets of Atsina aggression. According to Tomison "these always having been a peaceable People till now and what they have done I judge to be out of spite as they could not be revenged on the Southd and stone Indians for murdering so many of them last Summer."[124]

Following the October 1793 attack several more altercations hinted at the increasingly menacing intentions of the Atsina and Siksika attackers. During the winter of 1793-4 the Atsina and Siksika bands who had pillaged Manchester House-Pine Island House nursed their anger at the death of their kin. In early January a large band of about 150 Siksika men led by Big Man (O mok apee) arrived to trade at the Buckingham House and Fort George. According to Tomison many of them "were very ill behaved several of them were cloathed in our Cloth and had a great many new Guns with them these I judge to have been conjunct with the fall Indians in the robbing of Manchester House last fall."[125] According to Duncan M'Gillivray, the band had returned to the posts to avenge the deaths of the autumn but they found the forts well guarded. They stole about sixty horses "threatening at the same time to *Scalp* the people & plunder the goods, as a Sacrifice to *appease the Spirits* of their deceased relations."[126] Upon leaving the post they encountered Duncan M'Gillivray and two other NWC men who were returning to the post after making a trading visit to a camp. They pillaged the men and "stript [them] to their shirts and had it not been near the House they must have perished."[127]

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[122] The above account is a summary of accounts in the following locations: HBCA B.24/a/2, 22 October 1793; HBCA B.49/a/25ª, 28 December 1793; HBCA B.205/a/8, William Tomison (Buckingham House) to James Bird (South Branch House), 25 October 1793 (fo. 31); HBCA F 3/1, Duncan McGillivray (Grand Portage) to Simon McTavish, 26 July 1794; Morton, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, xlix (which is John McDonald of Garth's version); and HBCA B.135/a/82, George Sutherland to John Thomas, 18 February 1795 (fo. 57).

[123] HBCA B.205/a/8, James Bird (South Branch House) to William Tomison (Buckingham House), 8 November 1793.

[124] HBCA B.205/a/8, William Tomison (Buckingham House) to James Bird (South Branch House), 25 October 1793 (fo. 31).

On 18 January 1794 William Tomison mentioned the arrival of a group of Siksika and Blood at Buckingham House who "behaved very rudely so that I was obliged to disarm them before they came into the House one of those that went to the Canadian House fired upon the Men that was waiting their arrival without any Provocation whatever; such behaviour I cannot account for."[128] In February Tomison sent men from Buckingham House to retrieve what they could from Manchester House. There they met a large group of about 150 Siksika and Fall men who traded 1200 wolves and some horses. They stole fifty-two horses that night. According to Tomison, "had they not seen 50 armed men at the Canadian House its not known what lengths they would have gone to."[129]

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[125] HBCA B.205/a/8, William Tomison (Buckingham House) to James Bird (South Branch House), 27 January 1794, (fo. 35d-36).

[126] HBCA F 3/1, Duncan McGillivray (Grand Portage) to Simon McTavish, 26 July 1794. Emphasis in the original.

[127] HBCA B.205/a/8, William Tomison (Buckingham House) to James Bird (South Branch House), 27 January 1794, (fo. 35d-36). Duncan M'Gillivray's description of this incident is found in HBCA F 3/1, Duncan McGillivray (Grand Portage) to Simon McTavish, 26 July 1794. That this was Big Man's band is revealed in Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 44-5. The evidence that Big Man and Gros Blanc are the same person is explained in Theodore Binnema, "Conflict or Cooperation?: Blackfoot Trade Strategies, 1794-1815," M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1992, 30-1.

Until the spring of 1794 no fur trader had lost his life in the turmoil. Perhaps because of the deaths they suffered at the hands of the Canadians, or perhaps because of continued attacks by the Cree, the apparent reluctance of the Atsina to shed the blood of Euroamericans evaporated by June 1794. The target of their most severe attack on Euroamericans was South Branch House on 24 June 1794. If the 1793 attack was aimed purely at plunder, this attack was clearly also aimed at killing as many fur traders as possible and at the complete destruction of the fur trade facilities.

On 27 May the HBC canoes left South Branch House for York Factory leaving five men and five or six women and several children at the post for the summer. On 24 June two men, William Fea and Cornelius Van Driel, were at the post. One, James Gaddy, Jr., was gathering birch bark about fifty miles from the post, and two others, Magnus Annel and Hugh Brough, in company with a Cree man known as "the Flute," were looking for the company's horses two or three miles from the post.

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[128] HBCA B.24/a/2, 18 January 1794.

[129] HBCA B.24/a/2, 5 February 1794.

> They heard a great noise resembling the galloping of horses which hastily approached them, but judging them to be Stone Indians, as they knew them to be their Friends were not alarmed, the Southd Indian suspecting them to be Fall Indians, begged of them to go with him into a hammock that was just by while they passed but they were both deaf to his entreats, and paid no regard to them, however, the Southd Indn hasten'd into the thicket and hid himself, soon after to the amount of about one hundred Fall Inds made their appearance upon horse back, and riding up to our two Men alighted, kill'd and scalped them which they took away. They then proceeded towards the House.[130]

The neighbouring NWC and HBC South Branch Houses were built on the south shore of the South Saskatchewan River valley. The HBC post defences however, were built merely to curb theft and mischief, not to withstand a concerted attack. According to Cornelius Van Driel, the HBC post was "surrounded with stockades that the 1st gale of wind we expected would level with the ground."[131] When the attack began, NWC interpreter Jacques Raphael was out on a recreational horse ride when he saw the large group of 100 to 250 (accounts vary) Atsina and Siksika attackers.[132] Perceiving their hostile intentions, he raced back to the NWC fort in time for the four or five Canadian and three to five Cree men in residence to secure it. The two HBC men also had time to shut the gates to their post before the Atsina arrived and surrounded it. Obviously outnumbered but hoping to defuse the situation, the traders held their fire but the attackers set the stockades on fire, and

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[130] HBCA B.135/a/82, George Sutherland to John Thomas, 18 February 1795, fo. 57d.

[131] HBCA A. 11/117, "YF J.C. Van Driel's Narrative," fo. 164d.

[132] The attack on the South Branch Houses was remembered as an Atsina attack but some early accounts note that some Siksika were involved as well. See HBCA B.49/a/26, Magnas Twatt (Cumberland House) to Malcolm Ross (York Factory), 5 September 1794.

> saw Willm Fea through the Stockades they fired at him and broke his arm — he immediately went through the Window at the back of the house into the Garden followed by M^r Vandriel the former laying down in an Old Cellar and the Latter in another one about 10 Yds apart, which very fortunately was full of rubbish which he covered himself with, presently the Inds broke open the Gates and entered the House and traced Willm Fea (by his blood) into the Cellar and Shot him dead. Mr Vandriel expecting every moment to Share the same fate, finding no more Men about the House they plunder'd it of every thing set fire to it and reduced it to Ashes, which loss is estimated at 4000 Beaver on their quiting the House they Stabbed Mags Annels Wife kill'd two of his Children, which they put onto their mothers Belly, three young women belong[in]g to the Men that went to the Factory they took prisoner with them after plundering and destroying our house they went to the Canadians about 300 Yards distant intending to serve them in the same horrid manner."[133]

In contrast to the HBC post the NWC post at South Branch House was a well-built fort complete with block houses "about 40 ft long & wide and supported by four posts 20 f high with four or six small portholes on each, the logs &c 10 Inhs thick Proof against the Musquet ball."[134] The NWC fort was also defended by Louis Chastelain, four Canadians, and three Cree men. In fact, the NWC men were so well defended that they killed five and wounded nine of the attackers without suffering an injury themselves. The attackers shot at the fort from the protection of a small rise for about half and hour "when their War Chief L'Homme de Callumet a brave and undaunted Indian disparing of success from the mode of attack, which did not agree with his fiery nature, advanced a second time towards the Gates encouraging his Warriors to follow him; but he was interupted [*sic*] in the midst of his harrangue [*sic*] by a Shot from the Before mentioned interpreter which Streched [*sic*] him breathless on the ground, and the miscreants after recovering his body, retreated with mournfull lamentations for loss of their leader and threatening vengeance against the authors of his death."[135]

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[133] HBCA B.135/a/82, George Sutherland to John Thomas, 18 February 1795, fo. 57d. Van Driel survived the attack and the fire and escaped down river in the evening.

[134] HBCA B.135/a/82, George Sutherland to John Thomas, 18 February 1795, fo. 58.

The attack on South Branch House changed life in the region dramatically. Traders quickly abandoned or fortified their more vulnerable positions while Native bands fled dangerous territory. Within days of the attack, Louis Chastillain, leader at the NWC post, abandoned the physically unscathed NWC post at South Branch House and established a post at Nipawi (Fort St. Louis). Beside this post, James Bird replaced the destroyed HBC post with Nippoewin House. More permanent replacements for the South Branch Houses were built farther up the river in 1795 or 1796 at Peonan Creek, just below the forks of the Saskatchewan. The HBC named its post Carlton House, and, although safely within Cree territory, James Bird was ordered to have it "fortified in such a manner that no tribe of Indians dare approach it in a hostile manner in the future—the Muskettoons are well calculated to awe the Natives."[136] The NWC abandoned Pine

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[135] Morton, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 14. M'Gillivary suggests that the NWC post was attacked before the HBC post, but he was not at South Branch House at the time. Van Driel's accounts make it clear that the HBC post was attacked first. There is no shortage of accounts of this incident. The events are retold in journals by fur traders who were not even in the country at the time, witnessing to the importance of the event in the oral traditions of the traders. The account above is a summary of evidence available in the following: HBCA B.135/a/82, George Sutherland (York Factory) to John Thomas (Moose Fort), 18 February 1795, fo. 57-8; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 75-6; Morton, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 13-15; HBCA B.49/a/26, 9 July 1794 and Magnas Twatt (Cumberland House) to Malcolm Ross (York Factory), 5 September 1794; HBCA A.11/117, "YF J.C. Van Driel's Narrative," fos 163-5; F. 3/1, Cornelius Van Driel to John Fisk, (York Factory), 18 September 1794 (fo. 195).

[136] HBCA B.49/a/27*, George Sutherland (Cumberland House) to James Bird, 16 November 1795 (also in HBCA B.27.a/1, 16 November 1795). A musquetoon was a short, large-bore blunderbuss. Carlton House was relocated several times over the next

Island House in the spring of 1794, and the HBC never rebuilt its sacked Manchester House. When they heard of the attack, the HBC employees at Buckingham House abandoned their post and moved in with the NWC at Fort George until their post could be made more secure. The Cree bands also withdrew from the Buckingham House region.[137] In the fall of 1794 the HBC and NWC men embarked up river in company for their mutual protection. The HBC sent only nine canoes up to the upper posts, compared with sixteen the year before.[138] The NWC Saskatchewan River outfit consisted of sixteen canoes, three fewer than the previous year's outfit.[139]

Despite the fear that the attacks inspired, they were launched from a position of weakness and desperation, not strength and confidence. They represented a desperate attempt by the Atsina to maintain their position on the northwestern plains. Their attempt was unsuccessful. In 1794 the Atsina responsible for the attacks apparently fled south in efforts to make an alliance with the Shoshoni and "abandon this quarter for ever."[140] Evidently, however, none of the Atsina did abandon the region forever in 1794. Soon the

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decades. For example, from 1805 to 1810 it was located near the site of old South Branch House, and thereafter it was near the site of old Hudson House. Curiously Carlton House is a link between two significant events in the history of the northwestern plains. Constructed in response to the Atsina attack on fur traders in 1794, its final destruction came on 27 March 1885 during the North-West Rebellion.

[137] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 29.

[138] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 17.

[139] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 4.

[140] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 39, 69. They withdrew to the "Rocky Mountains," evidently meaning the Bighorn Mountains, which the Atsina and Blackfoot considered to be part of the Rocky Mountains, see Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 27, and the Atsina and Blackfoot maps.

belligerents returned to be reconciled to the fur traders. With little ability to avenge the deaths, and little hope for profit without peace, the fur traders were quick to reconcile, although the memory of the events of June 1794 was preserved in the fur traders' collective memory for decades. The Atsina were never reconciled with the Cree and Assiniboine bands of the region. A severe winter in 1794-5 only encouraged further raids upon the Atsina.[141] The tenuous position of the Atsina in the Saskatchewan basin only deteriorated further after 1794, and their gradual withdrawal towards the Missouri basin, and towards their Arapaho kin, had begun.

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[141] The winter of 1794-5 was very severe and snowy after the beginning of January. This clearly affected the horse herds. The Blood and Siksika brought their spring trade in on dogs rather than horses because the horses were in such bad condition, Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 69.

Chapter Eight
The Apogee of the Northern Coalition, 1794-1806

> From what they [the Siksika] relate respecting the *Gros Ventres* we have lost all hopes of seeing them this Spring. They are in the same dispositions as they were represented by our last accounts; that is, desirous of renewing their intercourse with us and our allies, but fearfull [*sic*] of a bad reception: for as they are naturally treacherous and vindictive themselves, it is reasonable to suppose that they suspect others of the same sentiments especially as they are conscious of having merited chastisement for their late depredations; and untill [*sic*] they can be assured that no violence is intended against them, at least as far as regards their persons I am affraid [*sic*] they will not be persuaded to visit us.
>
> Duncan M'Gillivray, 15 April 1795.

> On the north side of the Missouri, near the Rocky mountains, resides a nation of Indians, who are numerous and who are the inveterate enemies of the Gros Ventres [Hidatsa] and the Crow Indians, and frequently fall on their hunting parties. They are called the Blackfoot Indians.[1]
>
> Charles Le Raye, 1802.

> They [the Shoshoni] told me that to avoid their enemies who are eternally harrassing [*sic*] them that they were obliged to remain in the interior of these [Rocky] mountains at least two thirds of the year where the[y] suffered as we then saw great heardships [*sic*] for the want of food sometimes living for weeks without meat and only a little fish roots and berries. but this added Cameahwait, with his ferce [*sic*] eyes and lank jaws grown meager for the want of food, would not be the case if we had guns, we could then live in the country of buffaloe [*sic*] and eat as our enimies [*sic*] do and not be compelled to hide ourselves in these mountains and live on roots and berries as the bear do.[2]
>
> Meriwether Lewis, 20 August 1805

After the incidents of 1793 and 1794, the Atsina became the Ishmaelites of the northern plains, isolated from all but their Arapaho kin. Their relationships with neighbouring Cree and Assiniboine bands were beyond repair. The Atsina maintained generally peaceful albeit distant relationships with some of the Blackfoot bands, but the Blackfoot bands were preoccupied with their own relationships with Cree and Assiniboine bands. Their relationships with Cree and Assiniboine bands were fragile, but several skilled diplomats managed to defuse hostile incidents and maintain a general state of peace. The northern coalition of bands, minus the Atsina bands, continued to hold together. The turn of the nineteenth century witnessed the Blackfoot bands at their peak of power and dominance on the northwestern plains. To the south, the diverse bands of the southern coalition, now dominated by the Crow, resolutely continued to exploit the bison herds on the periphery of the northwestern plains, at least seasonally. Indeed, some bands continued raiding their Blackfoot enemies, but they themselves could find no place where they were safe from the formidable "Raiders on the Northwestern Plains."[3] Their sources of supply of European goods, especially from the Middle Missouri villages, became more dependable, but their access to European weaponry remained inadequate to stem Blackfoot aggression. Meanwhile, the Euroamerican fur traders continued to compete amongst themselves for the resources of the region, and their struggle continued to influence the patterns of trade, warfare, and diplomacy on the northwestern plains.

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[1] Charles Le Raye, "Journal of Charles Le Raye," 177.

[2] Entered under the date 14 August 1805, this entry apparently refers to events of 20 August, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 5: 91. In Reuben Gold Twaites, *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition: 1804-1806*, (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959) this passage is found in the entry of 20 August (2: 383-4).

Fur Trade Expansion

Despite the increasingly volatile nature of life on the northwestern plains, the rapid geographical expansion of the fur trade across the northwestern interior of North America continued (Figure 8.1). Although the fur resources in the North Saskatchewan River basin were far fewer than they were in the eldorado of the Athabasca, the contest

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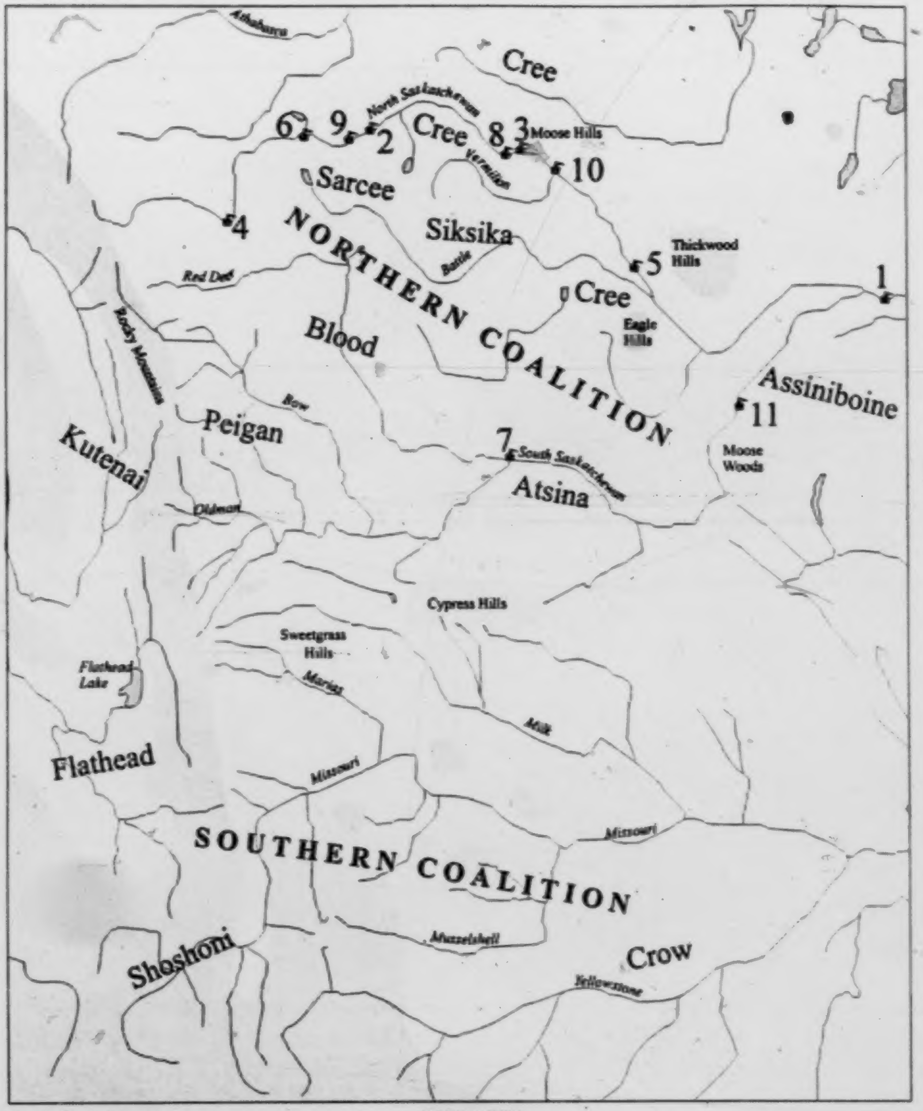
[3] This phrase, of course, is derived from Ewers's classic history, *The Blackfeet: Raiders.*

Figure 8.1
Location of Euroamerican Trading Centres and Native Groups, 1795-1806.


Athabasca
Cree
North Saskatchewan
6
9
2
Cree
8
3
Moose Hills
Vermilion
10
Sarcee
4
NORTHERN COALITION
Siksika
Battle
Thickwood Hills
5
1
Red Deer
Rocky Mountains
Cree
Eagle Hills
Blood
Assiniboine
11
Bow
Peigan
Kutenai
7
South Saskatchewan
Moose Woods
Atsina
Oldman
Cypress Hills
Sweetgrass Hills
Marias
Flathead Lake
Milk
Flathead
Missouri
Missouri
SOUTHERN COALITION
Musselshell
Crow
Shoshoni
Yellowstone

1. Carlton House I	1795-1805
2. Edmonton House/Fort Augustus I	1795-1802
3. Buckingham House/Fort George	1792-1801
4. Rocky Mountain House/Acton House	1799-
5. Somerset House	1799-1800
6. Nelson House	1799-1801
7. Chesterfield House	1800-02, 1804-05.
8. Island House/Fort de l'Isle	1801-1802
9. Edmonton House/Fort Augustus II	1802-1810
10. Fort Vermilion/Paint River House	c. 1802-
11. South Branch House/Carlton House II	1804-

there was fierce. Having amalgamated with, absorbed, or crushed its main competitors, the exceedingly prosperous NWC faced only feeble challengers from Canada between 1787 and 1795.[4] Disaffected Nor'Westers, David and Peter Grant, organized their weak opposition in 1793 but the NWC absorbed this short-lived and ill-fated partnership in 1796.[5] The NWC, however, was about to face far stiffer competition. After 1794, the Jay Treaty, which stipulated that the British would abandon posts in the United States by 1796, induced many British traders still operating in the U.S. to abandon the fur trade of the south west, and direct their efforts towards the northwest. For instance, Forsyth, Richardson & Company, subsidiary of the London firm, Phyn, Ellice and Company, which had operated in the southwest since 1783, turned its attention from the trade of the United States, to the northwest.[6] This company merged with the Detroit firm of Leith, Jamieson & Company in October 1798 to form the New North West Company which became better known as the XY Company (XYC).[7] Similarly, the Montreal firm of Parker, Gerrard and Ogilvy, which had traded only on the south shore of Lake Superior before 1796, was in the Athabasca by 1800.[8] The fears of the NWC partners were realized in 1800 when this firm joined the XYC to form a formidable opposition to the NWC. Alexander Mackenzie, who originally apprenticed with Gregory, McLeod and Company, appears never to have felt at home in the NWC. He apparently assisted the New North West Company even before his own contract with the NWC expired in late 1799, and he joined the company officially in 1802 and it was reorganized under the name Sir Alexander Mackenzie & Company in 1803.[9] Unlike the HBC, the XYC challenged the NWC, not only in the Saskatchewan basin, but also in the Athabasca. The result was that between 1798 and 1804 the NWC and XYC engaged in a bitter and violent commercial rivalry made all the more keen by the bitter personal animosities that accompanied it.[10] Neither the NWC nor the XYC was profitable in these years.[11] The unprofitable competition might have continued until one of the companies collapsed, but the sudden death of Simon McTavish, pre-eminent figure in the NWC since 1779, smoothed the way for a merger of the XYC and the NWC on 5 November 1804.[12] The XYC was the NWC's last significant Canadian rival in the northwest. The ferocity and violence of the contests had never made the fur trade of the northwest a place for the faint of heart, but after 1804 the NWC ruthlessly crushed all opposition from Canada.[13] Henceforth the struggle would be primarily between the NWC and the HBC. The HBC had made only half-hearted attempts to exploit the Athabasca. No HBC employee visited the Athabasca until 1791, and the first HBC post in the Athabasca was established in 1802. Even that effort was abandoned in 1806.[14] While flamboyance and aggressiveness of the NWC and XYC make the HBC appear as weak and passive, the HBC remained very profitable during the years of NWC and XYC competition, and marginally profitable for several years thereafter.[15]

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[4] Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 16.

[5] R. Harvey Fleming, "The Origin of 'Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company'," *Canadian Historical Review* 9 (1928): 141; Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 16. Also see Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 48, 54, 59.

[6] Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 16.

[7] Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 17.

[8] Fleming, "The Origin of 'Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company'," 142-3; Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 17.

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[9] Fleming, "The Origin of 'Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company'," 142.

[10] NWC trader Daniel Williams Harmon reflected on the enmity and bloodshed in his journal entry of 28 December 1803; Lamb, *Sixteen Years in Indian Country*.

[11] Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 19.

[12] Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 19.

[13] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, A-18-21.

In the Saskatchewan River basin, the intense competition and the exhaustion of fur resources near older posts, encouraged a proliferation of fur trade posts, that, by the turn of the nineteenth century, reached the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The NWC took the initiative, but the HBC, which all but abandoned hopes of competing in the Athabasca, captured a large portion of the trade of the northwestern plains. In the spring of 1795, Angus Shaw of the NWC decided to build a post near the Beaver Hills, about five days' journey above Fort George/Buckingham House. Duncan M'Gillivray of the NWC explained that the post would be built at "the termination of an extensive plain contained between two Branches of this [Saskatchewan] River." He continued that

> this is described to be a rich and plentiful Country, abounding with all kinds of animals especially Beavers & Otters, which are said to be so numerous that the Women & children kill them with Sticks and hatchets. — The Country arround [*sic*] Fort George is now entirely ruined. The Natives have already killed all the Beavers, to such a distance that they lose much time in coming to the House,

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[14] Glyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870," *The Beaver* 314 (2) (October 1983): 40, 43.

[15] Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 2: 221; Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade," 42-3.

> during the Hunting Season. The Lower Fort [Fort George/Buckingham House] will only therefore serve in future for the *Gens du Large*, whilst the Crees Assiniboines, and Circees, being the Principal Beaver Hunters will resort to the Forks [Augustus-Edmonton]. — This division of the Indians will be doubly advantageous to the Co, both with respect to augmenting the usual returns & taking the [beaver hunting] natives out of the reach of any opposition, (except the English) for the ensuing Winter at least."[16]

Thus, during the summer of 1795 James Hughes built Fort Augustus near the mouth of the Sturgeon River at present-day Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, and William Tomison built the HBC's Edmonton House in the same October. M'Gillivray's hopeful prediction that other Canadian concerns would be unable to respond was wrong, however. Two rival Canadian concerns soon joined the NWC and HBC during the same autumn.[17]

With the emergence of the XYC, the HBC and NWC became unlikely allies in an attempt to force the upstarts out of business.[18] Hudson's Bay Company and NWC posts proliferated as the two companies tried to take advantage of the XYC's shortage of personnel.[19] The most important of these new posts were the Rocky Mountain House/Acton House complex and the Chesterfield House complex.[20] During the summer of 1799 NWC traders travelled to the mouth of the Clearwater River, about fifteen difficult days' travel up the North Saskatchewan River from Fort Augustus, to establish Rocky Mountain House. Because of the resistance of western Cree bands, the NWC and HBC did not actually build their posts until autumn. While Edmonton was on the edge of the plains, Rocky Mountain House was certainly not a plains post. Built in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, the post had "grand and romantic" views of those mountains.[21] According to James Bird the country was "far from appearing so bad as represented to us [by the Cree], though very different from the agreeable plains below here; now nothing can be seen but the gloomy tops of pines till the Rocky Mountain (whose icy summits seem to pierce the sky) intercepts the view."[22] Rocky Mountain House was built in the foothills country which was "in general covered with wood and at intervals small prairions until about a mile or in some places more within, where large open swamps are found. The Wood principally is of Pine, of several kinds, Aspen, Willow and some Birch."[23]

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[16] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 11 May 1795.

[17] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 3 November 1795. These would have been established by a Mr. King on behalf of David and Peter Grant, and by François Beaubien or one of his representatives; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, xxxii. Their share of the trade, however, was dwarfed by that of the HBC and NWC, Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, xxxvii. For the HBC, the establishment of posts beyond Buckingham House required adjustments in their transportation system. Gordon House was established at the "Painted Stone" on the Hayes River to act as an inland depot, making the trip to York Factory unnecessary. This allowed the use of York boats, (large wooden cargo boats) requiring half the men required by canoes, on the trips between Edmonton and Gordon House; HBCA A. 6/16, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 31 May 1799 (fo. 80). Also see John E. Foster, "York Boat" in *The Canadian Encylopedia*, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988), 2352.

[18] HBCA A. 6/16, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 31 May 1799 (fo. 78d).

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[19] Given the HBC's own serious labour shortage at this time, the proliferation of posts also stretched the human resources of that company significantly; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 224.

[20] In 1799 the companies established posts at Nelson House along the North Saskatchewan River west of Edmonton for the convenience of the Swampy Ground Assiniboine of that region, and at Somerset House (at Turtlelake River not far upstream from the Eagle Hills) for the convenience of valued Cree bands of that area, Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 2 November 1799. Both of these posts were short-lived. Somerset House operated only for the 1799-1800 season; Nelson House operated for two seasons.

[21] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 20 September 1799.

[22] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 25 September 1799.

Chesterfield House, established in 1800 at the confluence of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan Rivers, was a bold experiment for the fur trading companies, for it was situated well outside the territory of the Cree and Assiniboine. It was tremendously important because, in contrast to the earlier posts established in or near the parkland region, Chesterfield House was well within the plains. Because of its situation and because of missing and contradictory journals, aspects of the history of Chesterfield House are not easy to reconstruct. One historian has erroneously argued that Chesterfield House was more or less constantly operated from 1800 until 1821.[24] Others have argued that it existed for only a few seasons. In fact, Chesterfield House operated in the 1800-01, 1801-02 and 1804-05 seasons.

As was the case elsewhere, it was probably the NWC that took the initiative on the South Saskatchewan River, although the HBC traders were actually the first to build there.[25] Peter Fidler established Chesterfield House in the autumn of 1800 where he was soon joined by Pierre Belleau of the NWC and John Wills of the XYC. Fidler and Belleau agreed to build within one stockade and, in keeping with their policy of non-cooperation with the XYC, left Wills to build separate facilities.[26] In 1801 only the HBC and XYC returned to the site. It is surprising, given the harrowing events of the 1801-02 season, that the traders returned at all, but they abandoned the site only until the autumn of 1804. Then John McDonald and James Hughes led a crew of about twenty five NWC men to reoccupy the site.[27] Joseph Howse led the twenty-man HBC contingent at the same site.[28] The scant evidence shows that the winter of 1804-05 at Chesterfield House was as tumultuous as the 1801-02 season.[29] The dangers they encountered in that season evidently convinced the traders to abandon the location for almost twenty years.

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[23] Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 519.

[24] Paul F. Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 34.

[25] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, lxxi, lxxvii, lxxxi.

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[26] David J. Fairfield, "Chesterfield House and the Bow River Expedition," M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1970, 10.

[27] John McDonald of Garth, "Autobiographical Notes," L. R. Masson, ed., *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest*, (Quebec: A. Cote etc., 1890), 2: 29.

[28] McDonald's journal says this was in the autumn of 1805. McDonald's journal, however, is the product of an old forgetful man, and it contains many obvious errors of chronology. This has led some to suggest that the John McDonald was at the post between 1800 and 1802; Terry Smythe, "Thematic Study of the Fur Trade in the Canadian West: 1670-1870," (Ottawa: Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 1968), 199; Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," 26. The evidence is clear, however, that the site was reoccupied in 1804-05. Alice Johnson has found clear evidence that Joseph Howse led the HBC post in 1804-05, although no journal of that season has survived; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 298n. David Fairfield, after retracing the movements of McDonald, concluded that he could have been at Chesterfield House only in 1804-05; Fairfield, "Chesterfield House and the Bow River Expedition," 38. McDonald's description of a "Missouri Indian" attack (discussed later in this chapter) that perfectly matches the account of a Hidatsa attack on Canadian fur traders in the spring of 1805, and Atsina accounts of visiting McDonald's Chesterfield House during the winter of 1804-05, confirm that this was the year the post was occupied. The Atsina account is in Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 191. Clearly then, John McDonald and James Hughes undertook the 1804-05 expedition for the NWC, and Joseph Howse countered for the HBC. According to McDonald, the HBC joined the NWC at New Chesterfield House. John McDonald of Garth, "Autobiographical Notes," 30.

[29] Fairfield, "Chesterfield House and the Bow River Expedition," 34-6.

Historians have not agreed on why the traders even built posts at Chesterfield House. Some interpretations are very unconvincing. For example, A.S. Morton argued that traders established the posts to draw the Blackfoot away from the North Saskatchewan, and to draw Missouri River bands northward.[30] J.E.A. Macleod argued that it was built "in whole or in part, to meet the American opposition" — a need that he argued was obviated by Blackfoot hostility to Americans after the Lewis and Clark expedition.[31] Others arguments seem more plausible. Some have reasonably assumed that Chesterfield House was a provisions post.[32] While the provisions trade may have played a part in the decision to expand onto the plains, the activities of the traders suggest that it is an insufficient explanation. The HBC attempted a northward expansion in 1799-1800, and this expansion required a greater stock of provisions.[33] Still, Peter Fidler made only half-hearted attempts at provisions gathering, and the NWC suffered no shortage of pemmican at the time.[34] Ironically, the best evidence suggests that the establishment of the posts had little to do with the plains trade. John McDonald's explanation that he was sent "to explore the country and trade with the Blackfeet and Missouri Indians" hints that exploration was an important part of the post's purpose.[35] The NWC had sponsored significant explorations, including the first known crossing of North America by Alexander Mackenzie in 1793. These explorations were crucial to the NWC's efforts to compete with other companies, for its success depended on outdistancing its competition. The NWC's attempt to establish an easily travelled route to the Pacific, however, had been stymied. The NWC probably established Chesterfield House in part to explore the possibility of using the South Saskatchewan River system to gain access to the transmountain bands or even to develop a transportation route to the Pacific. In 1800 the post also suited the NWC's aim of stretching the XYC's resources. Chesterfield House traders gathered plentiful furs and provisions, but the establishment of the posts had more to do with the competition among fur trade companies than a desire to exploit the resources of the plains.

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[30] Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, 511.

[31] J. E. A. Macleod, "Piegan Post and the Blackfoot Trade," *Canadian Historical Review* 24 (1943): 274.

[32] James G. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor: 1769-1822* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 124; Richard Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) 63.

[33] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, lxviii-lxxi, 85, 230n.

[34] Binnema, "Conflict or Cooperation," 58-60.

Fur trade posts were only semi-permanent establishments. Poorly situated posts were abandoned after only a year, but even well-situated posts were eventually abandoned or relocated as local fuel supplies and fur resources were exhausted. Accordingly, the traders abandoned the Fort George/Buckingham House complex in 1800 and replaced it with Island House about twenty miles upstream.[36] In light of its inconvenient location Island House was abandoned after one year, and it is likely that the Fort Vermilion/Paint River House complex, established about 1802, replaced it. In 1802 the original Fort

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[35] John McDonald of Garth, "Autobiographical Notes," 29.

[36] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, lxxxiv.

Augustus and Fort Edmonton were abandoned and new posts, with the same names, were built near the site of present-day downtown Edmonton.

Native Groups Adjust to New Opportunities

As always, expansion of Euroamerican fur traders into new regions in the 1790s had important implications for Native bands. Euroamerican fur traders had their hopes for their new settlements, but the Natives of the northwestern plains had objectives of their own. Ultimately the posts evolved into what the most powerful local bands wanted them to be. Traders, for example, hoped that the plains bands would continue trading at Fort George and Buckingham House while Fort Augustus and Edmonton House would cater to Cree, Assiniboine, and Sarcee beaver hunters exclusively. The upper posts, however, immediately began attracting Peigan, Sarcee, Blood, Siksika, and Atsina bands. These bands brought in a great deal of fur and provisions in the first years.[37] The Blackfoot brought in, if not most, then certainly a very substantial portion of the trade.[38] In 1796, when a band of Siksika arrived at the Beaver Hills posts, George Sutherland of the HBC and Angus Shaw of the NWC told them "not to bring their Wolves & Provisions here" but to take them to Buckingham House. The Siksika, however, professed fear of some Assiniboine who were pounding buffalo in that vicinity.[39] Traders quickly abandoned hopes of sending Blackfoot traders to the lower establishments.

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[37] During the first four years Edmonton House averaged over 10,000 MB per year, while Buckingham House was averaging less than 3000 MB per year; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, Appendix A.

[38] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 130 (referring to 1798).

[39] HBCA B.24/a/4, George Sutherland (Edmonton House) to Peter Fidler (Buckingham House) 12 December 1796.

After several attempts, Kutenai bands made their first visits to fur trade posts during the late 1790s. At Fort George on 28 February 1795, Duncan M'Gillivray reported that

> the Coutonées a tribe from the Southwest are determined to force their way this year to the Fort or perish in the attempt: rumour reports that their Chief [*sic*] has got a parchment Roll written by the Spaniards to the traders of this quarter, the contents of which are unknown. — The Gens du Large and all the other nations in this neighbourhood wishing to retain an exclusive trade among themselves, have hitherto prevented the Intentions of this Band, of commencing a friendly intercourse with the Fort, in order to exclude them from any share of our commodities, which they are well aware would put their enemies in a condition to defend themselves, from the attacks of those who are already acquainted with the use of arms. ... it is reported that they intend obtaining a safe passage hither by bribing their enemies with Bands of Horses. Whether this method will succeed we cannot judge, but it is shrewdly suspected that a party will be formed to intercept as usual their progress to this quarter.[40]

M'Gillivray's hunch was correct. There are no records of Kutenai visits to Fort George/Buckingham House. Edmonton and Fort Augustus, however, were considerably closer to their territory, and the first visits of the Kutenai to Euroamerican fur trade posts occurred there. In March of 1798 William Tomison noted the arrival of a large band of Blood and Peigan accompanied by "two of the Cuttencha tribe which I sent for. Those have not brought any furs of any kind but by their account their country abounds with all kinds, but far off."[41] These Kutenai may have been pleased to receive gifts worth 40 MB, but watching their Blood and Peigan hosts leave the post with thirty-six new guns would have tempered their joy.[42] Furthermore, this was probably the only visit the Kutenai ever made to Edmonton. The risks of attempting visits to Edmonton House without the sponsorship of the Blackfoot, and the cost of such visits with such sponsorship, made them impractical.[43] Fortunately for the Kutenai, the fur traders were eager to expand their operations towards Kutenai territory, which, the fur traders believed, was rich in beaver.[44]

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[40] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 56.

[41] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 12 March 1798.

Rocky Mountain House was established despite the opposition of certain Cree bands,[45] and the apparent misgivings of some of the Blackfoot. The traders' intention, clearly, was to open a regular trade with the Kutenai, although traders clearly doubted from the start whether the post was far enough upstream to achieve the purpose.[46] The difficulties of travelling on the river above and below Rocky Mountain House, however, made it impractical to establish posts farther up stream. The Peigan of the region agreed to try to bring in some Kutenai, but they can have seen little reason to keep their promise.[47] The Peigan probably did not oppose the construction of the posts because they understood that the posts were convenient for them but not for the Kutenai.

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[42] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 15 & 17 March 1798.

[43] The Kutenai's Blackfoot hosts would have been able to take whatever they wanted from the Kutenai.

[44] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 26 September 1799.

[45] HBCA B.60/a/5, Letter of Peter Pruden (Buckingham House) to James Bird (on his way to Edmonton House) 10 August 1799.

[46] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 26 September & 2 November 1799; McDonald, "Autobiographical Notes," 26. McDonald gave the wrong year for the establishment of Rocky Mountain House.

[47] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 4 October 1799.

The traders made considerable efforts, in the early years, to establish Rocky Mountain House as a Kutenai post. Their efforts were thwarted by the uncooperative Peigan and Cree. In October 1800 NWC trader, David Thompson, "engaged Eapis, a hunter, and Nappé Kigow, a Piegan chief, to go in search of the Kootenays who dwell at the head of the Columbia River." With five NWC men and the two Native guides, who probably accompanied him more to monitor Thompson than to assist him, Thompson set out for the headwaters of the Red Deer River."[48] Thompson's party did meet twenty six Kutenai men and seven Kutenai women in the rugged upper Red Deer River valley on 14 October 1800. After the Kutenai made generous presents and complained that the Peigan had stolen most of their horses, Thompson convinced them to visit Rocky Mountain House — perhaps the first visit to a fur trade post that these individuals had ever made.[49] The experience can have done little to encourage the Kutenai to repeat the trip. Thompson began escorting the Kutenai to Rocky Mountain House but the Kutenai clearly did not enjoy the experience. Some of the Peigan were friendly but most seemed eager for plunder. By the time the Kutenai arrived at Rocky Mountain House on 20 October 1800, the Peigan had taken most of their horses. David Thompson expressed admiration for the resolve and bravery that the small band showed in the face of the far larger Peigan band, but it is unlikely that the Kutenai had embarked on the trip to prove their determination and courage.

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[48] Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 216.

[49] Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 218. Fidler believed that it was the first visit to a fur trade post that these Kutenai had ever made, HBCA E.3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," fos. 19d-20. This entry is dated 31 December 1792 but was obviously written later.

In November 1800 Thompson and Duncan McGillivray visited Sakatow's Peigan band at Spitcheyee (near present-day High River, Alberta) where Sakatow complained about the trade that had taken place between Euroamericans at Rocky Mountain House, and the Kutenai.[50] Sakatow probably understood, however, that Rocky Mountain House posed little threat to the Peigan. It quickly became clear that Rocky Mountain House was inadequate as a Kutenai post. Instead, the Peigan bands themselves traded primarily at this post, and their continual visits and vigilance ensured that Kutenai visits there were rare. Some Kutenai did make the trip. In the autumn of 1806 a Kutenai band visited Acton House to trade eighty beaver.[51] In the late winter another five Kutenai men arrived after an arduous sixteen day trip over the Rockies carrying about 100 MB worth of furs on their backs.[52] This last visit led James Bird to ask J.P. Pruden, in charge at Acton House, to stay at Acton House in hopes that another party of Kutenai would visit during the summer to arrange a rendezvous on the western side of the mountains.[53] By 1806 then, the fur traders understood that any substantial trade with the Kutenai would have to take place at a location other than Rocky Mountain House. The traders had accepted Rocky Mountain House and Acton House as exactly what the Peigan had intended them to be: Peigan posts. For the traders, any dismay was probably ameliorated by the fact that the Peigan bands who visited the site were the most prolific beaver hunters among the Blackfoot bands. For the Kutenai, the disappointment would have been unmitigated. The Kutenai in 1806 were as vulnerable on their visits to the northwestern plains as they had ever been.

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[50] Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 223.

[51] HBCA B.60/a/6, James Bird to John McNab, 23 December 1806 (fo. 6).

[52] HBCA B.60/a/6, 30 April 1807.

[53] HBCA B.60/a/6, James Bird to John Peter Pruden, 2 May 1807.

While Rocky Mountain House quickly emerged as a Peigan post despite the intentions of the traders, the traders always expected the Siksika to be their main customers at Chesterfield House. Chesterfield House was a remarkable experiment because it was isolated not only from the parklands and from other fur trade posts, but also from any Cree and Assiniboine bands.[54] The fur traders had to understand from the outset that they could not depend upon the Cree and Assiniboine for any assistance at the Chesterfield House site. The establishment and maintenance of Chesterfield House was made possible by the generally cordial relations between the Blackfoot bands and the Cree and Assiniboine bands, by the Blackfoot dominance of the entire South Saskatchewan River basin, and by the friendly relations between certain Siksika bands and the Euroamerican fur traders. The location of the posts, determined beforehand, was almost certainly decided by the Siksika bands led by Old Swan. Any knowledge Euroamericans may have had of the upper South Saskatchewan River had been forgotten, so no Euroamerican was likely to have chosen the location of the posts.[55] Furthermore, at Chesterfield House, Old Swan's band provided all the essential services: hunting, guiding, interpreting, courier, and horse herding, that were normally provided by Cree and Assiniboine bands at the North Saskatchewan River posts.[56]

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[54] HBC journals indicate that traders' trips from Chesterfield House to Edmonton and Island House took seventeen and twenty days respectively; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals*, 282, and 26 October 1801. A trip from Rocky Mountain House took sixteen nights for five Blood Indians; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals*, 10 April 1801. It was a four-day journey from the post to the closest forests at the Cypress Hills; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 31 January 1801.

Notwithstanding the friendship of Old Swan's band, the fur traders appear never to have been comfortable at Chesterfield House. Already on their initial ascent of the South Saskatchewan River, the traders were apprehensive of attack by plains Natives.[57] They were similarly apprehensive when they went downstream after their first season, even though the season had passed peacefully.[58] The apprehension was probably tied to the fact that the Atsina were among the primary customers at the post[59] and to the fact that fur traders themselves were often vastly outnumbered at the site. Fur traders were not accustomed to the number of Natives that would gather at Chesterfield House. For example, on 2 October 1801, Fidler estimated that 1400 Native men, women and children were camped at the Chesterfield Houses. Since many of the Natives that visited the post were Atsina, the reasons for the anxiety are obvious.

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[55] Fidler believed that no Euroamericans had ever travelled on the South Saskatchewan River above the site of the abandoned South Branch House (Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 15 August 1800), but one or more Euroamericans may have done so in the 1750s or 1760s.

[56] Binnema, "Conflict or Cooperation?," 65-9.

[57] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 21 August 1800, 3 September 1800.

[58] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 28 March 1801.

[59] Only a few months earlier a few Canadian traders heading down the North Saskatchewan River (who were apparently initially mistaken for Natives) were attacked, wounded, and captured by some Atsina who took several of their guns before releasing them; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 24 & 25 May 1800. None of the wounds were very serious but this event would have refreshed the fur traders' memories of the Atsina attacks of the 1790s.

Most of the visitors to Chesterfield House naturally were Siksika and Atsina who brought in overwhelmingly fox and wolf furs but virtually no beaver skins. If the traders entertained hopes of trading with the Crow and Shoshoni, or of acquiring significant beaver, they would be disappointed. The Siksika would certainly have prevented intercourse between the Crow and Shoshoni and the Euroamericans. Kin connections between the Atsina and Arapaho, however, enabled the Arapaho to trade at Chesterfield House. On 31 October 1801, a band of about twenty "Tatood Indians" arrived at the post. Fidler explained that

> this is part of a nation that never saw Europeans before. They inhabit on the eastern borders of the mountain far to the south of this, they have been forty-four days in coming, they speak nearly the same language as the Fall Indians and are at peace with them, who have escorted them here. They brought a few beaver skins with them but very ill coloured and badly dressed, they are a pretty numerous tribe amounting to about 90 or 100 tents. Their manners are different from the Fall Indians, but are nearly of the same size and features.[60]

The Arapaho, who had apparently arrived in the South Saskatchewan basin during the summer, stayed with the Atsina until the following spring. The winter of 1801-02 marks the only documented occasion that the Arapaho traded with Euroamericans in the Saskatchewan basin. The abandonment of Chesterfield House, the withdrawal of the

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[60] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 31 October 1801. Elsewhere Fidler wrote that these Arapaho had come from "the Red Deers River [Yellowstone] beyond the Big River [Missouri]" (HBCA B.39/a/2, 30 October 1801), but a forty-four day journey suggests that they had come from farther than that.

Atsina towards the Missouri River, and the arrival of American traders in the upper Missouri basin ensured that there were no future encounters.

The expansion of the Euroamerican fur trade onto the northwestern plains brought opportunities not only to the natives of the northwestern plains, but also to outsiders, Native and non-Native, that could serve as intermediaries between Native bands and the Euroamericans and as independent trappers. The Canadian companies always relied heavily upon *coureurs de drouine* (itinerant traders) who led Euroamerican trading parties from fur trade posts to Native winter camps. These men, by marrying eligible women of such bands, formed kin relations with prominent adult Native males. Since Euroamerican trading posts had little need for a large unskilled labour force during winter, officers encouraged *engagés* to spend much of the winter away from the posts, among their Native kin in order to reduce their costs and to establish and strengthen ties between particular bands and the particular trading concerns.

When their contract expired, *engagés*, typically debt-ridden, faced an unpromising future in Canadian society. Naturally then, some of those who were skilled hunters and trappers, and who were well connected with surrounding Native bands, chose not to return to Montreal but to remain in the interior where their subsistence, trapping, guiding, and interpreting skills would be relevant and where they enjoyed some prestige among both fur traders and Native bands. Kinship ties with Native bands were crucial for these *hommes libres* (freemen), for they ensured that the Euroamericans were part of the network of reciprocal obligations that tied related bands together. Also important to these freemen was their position as intermediaries in the fur trade. Their unique economic and social role as intermediaries between Native bands and Euroamerican fur traders and as assiduous trappers encouraged many families of freemen to associate and intermarry with one another rather than with Native or Euroamerican communities. Thus emerged an incipient Métis community in the northwest.[61] Many of these proto-Métis bands were found in the forests, but by the 1790s, communities of freemen enjoying connections with local Cree bands, were also wintering on the northwestern plains between the North Saskatchewan and Red Deer Rivers.[62] The freemen did not typically have close ties with the Blackfoot or Atsina bands, and thus they were limited to the northern reaches of the plains where Cree and Assiniboine bands predominated.

Beginning around 1800 a substantial number of eastern Natives, particularly Iroquois, from communities near Montreal were among the *engagés* that arrived in the northwest. Their canoeing, hunting, and trapping skills made them very attractive to fur trade companies. In the first few years of the nineteenth century the NWC brought hundreds of eastern Native *engagés* to the North Saskatchewan River region.[63] Some Native groups were initially quite willing to accept the newcomers. For example, in November 1800, David Thompson and Duncan McGillivray asked for and received permission from the Peigan to take some Iroquois and Saulteaux trappers into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.[64] Other groups, like the Atsina, viewed them as a threat, and were instantly hostile.[65] Nevertheless, possessed of the requisite subsistence and sociopolitical skills, many of eastern Natives quickly became freemen and were quickly integrated into the bands of other freemen.[66] Within a few decades they were found throughout western America.

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[61] A fine explication of this process is given in John E. Foster, "Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis," *Prairie Forum* 19 (1994): 1-7.

[62] HBCA E.3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 18 March 1793.

[63] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, xci-xcii; Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 312.

The Northern Coalition, 1794-1806

The hostilities that flared up between Blackfoot bands and Cree and Assiniboine bands in the 1780s apparently subsided in the 1790s. Still, the symbiotic relationship that had existed before the 1780s was never restored. By late 1780s, peaceful relationships survived because of skillful diplomacy. Some of the leaders best able to broker the peace died in the early 1790s, however. The primary link between the Cree and Peigan communities for decades had been Young Man, who had grown up among the Cree but become a prominent Peigan leader. Because of his background and demeanor Young Man "was universally beloved by all the Pecanow Tribe — & made himself respected amongst the adjacent friendly nations." In the spring of 1792, however, Young Man was bitten by a beaver and "this bite not being properly attended, the warm weather coming on & being an old man — this mortified & carried him of[f] in June 1793."[67] The death of Young Man inevitably undermined the Peigan bands's ability to maintain peaceful relations with Cree bands. Other Peigan leaders, like Sakatow and Kootenay Man, did not possess the close family ties to the Cree bands that Young Man did. Sakatow, apparently born around 1740, was an impressive figure. He was a handsome and well built man with a considerable war record. He carried as a sign of his influence two otter skins covered with mother of pearl. According to Thompson, many of the Peigan considered him to be excessively violent and quarrelsome, but he was a very influential orator.[68] More concilatory, Kootenay Man (Kooanae Appe) was a very tall thin man who appeared to have disdained and avoided Sakatow but was "both loved and respected, and his people often wished him to take a more active part in their affairs but he confined himself to War, and the care of the camp in which he was, which was generally of fifty to one hundred tents."[69] As the most respected warrior among the Peigan in the 1780s and 1790s, Kootenay Man could typically be found leading bands farther southwest than any other Blackfoot bands. His preoccupation, and the preoccupation of the Peigan more generally, was with the struggle with their southern neighbours. This meant that Kootenay Man had little ability or motivation to influence Blackfoot relations with the

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[64] Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 223-4.

[65] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 314-5. In this passage Thompson relates how a band of Atsina killed twenty five Iroquois near the foothills of the Rockies, probably in 1801. Thompson also suggests that the local Cree were ambivalent towards the newcomers.

[66] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 312-7. The Iroquois in the west are discussed in some detail in Gertrude Nicks, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade in Western Canada," in Judd and Ray, *Old Trails and New Directions*, 85-101.

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[67] HBCA E.3/2, "Journal of a Journey over Land," 29 December 1792. Fidler here gauged Young Man to be the second most prominent Peigan leader, an assessment that fits David Thompson's judgement.

[68] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 346, HBCA E.3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 9 November 1792.

[69] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 347.

Cree. Especially with Young Man dead, it was the Siksika, who neighboured the Cree and Assiniboine bands, that were most important in managing the relationships among these bands.

The situation among the Siksika was much like that among the Peigan. Old Swan (or The Swan), was apparently the most prominent Siksika leader during the 1780s when the symbiotic relationships between the Blackfoot and the Cree and Assiniboine disappeared. According to NWC clerk, Duncan M'Gillivray, The Swan was "respected and esteemed by all the neighbouring tribes."[70] By the 1790s, however, Old Swan, like Young Man, was old and frail, and in December 1794 he "unluckily Stumbled over a Dog, and broke some blood vessel which occasioned his death 2 days thereafter."[71] Thereafter, the Siksika bands were divided in their approach to their neighbours.[72]

According to M'Gillivray, as Old Swan grew older and less vigorous Big Man gradually emerged as the foremost Siksika leader.[73] Big Man and Old Swan are a study in contrasts. Big Man, "the most corpulent Indian in the five nations that trades at the inland settlements, being upwards of 6½ feet round the belly and otherways stout in proportion," continuously found himself at the centre of acrimonious incidents.[74] According to M'Gillivray, "this formidable cheif [*sic*] is universally feared by all the neighbouring nations, his immense size contributes Greatly to this distinction & some acts of personal courage which he has displayed on many occasions have established his reputation so firmly that he is supposed to be the most daring and intrepid Indian in this Department."[75] Big Man has already been mentioned in connection with the unrest of 1793-4. By then his war record already included the killing of the brother of Sitting Badger, a prominent Plains Cree leader and firm friend of Euroamerican fur traders — and Sitting Badger still sought to avenge that death.[76] Big Man led western Siksika bands that neighboured the Blood. In fact, it seems that Big Man's Siksika bands were closely associated with Blood bands. The traders certainly described the behaviour of the Blood bands and Big Man's bands in similar terms.[77] Their distance between the Blood and Big Man's bands and the Cree and Assiniboine reduced the urgency for them to maintain cordial relations with those each other. Big Man then, was poorly positioned, and little inclined, to maintain the fragile state of peace that existed among the Siksika and Cree bands by 1794. In fact, Big Man appears to have contributed significantly to the process that undermined friendly relations between the Blackfoot and the Cree.

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[70] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 50.

[71] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 50.

[72] Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," *passim.*

[73] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 50.

[74] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 24 October 1801.

Big Man's rival among the Siksika was Old Swan's son, "Feathers," who symbolically assumed his father's name when his father died.[78] After 1794, although perhaps not before that date,[79] the younger Old Swan worked to preserve cordial relations between the Blackfoot bands and the Cree, Assiniboine, and the Euroamericans traders. Old Swan led the northeasternmost Siksika bands who were most vulnerable to any Cree or Assiniboine attacks. There is no direct evidence of kin relations between Old Swan's band and neighbouring Cree and Assiniboine bands,[80] but the efforts of Old Swan were instrumental in keeping the relationships between the Blackfoot bands and the Cree-Assiniboine bands generally peaceful until 1806.

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[75] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 45-6.

[76] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 45. Sitting Badger is discussed in Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 75-6.

[77] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 44; Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journals*, 381, 424, 542, 546.

There is little doubt that hostile incidents continually threatened to destroy the Blackfoot coalition with the Cree and Assiniboine bands between 1794 and 1806. The greatest acrimony was probably between bands that normally camped far apart. Neither Big Man, nor any of the other Blackfoot were necessarily the instigator in hostilities. The main irritants were the frequent Cree and Assiniboine raids on Blackfoot horses. The Cree and Assiniboine, particularly the Assiniboine of the northeastern plains, maintained their reputation as the most prolific horse raiders of the region.[81] Still, between 1794 and 1806, fur traders on the North Saskatchewan River rarely mentioned hostilities between the Blackfoot bands and the Cree and Assiniboine.[82] In May 1795 some Cree went south from Edmonton to go to war, their targets were probably Crow or Shoshoni bands rather than the Blackfoot.[83] In late 1796 a Siksika band at Edmonton announced that it planned to attack the Assiniboine in the spring.[84] Still, given that warfare in the region had important implications for Euroamericans and their trade, the infrequent references to such warfare in the journals suggest that relations between the Blackfoot and their northern neighbours remained relatively peaceful between 1794 and 1806. Other evidence regarding Blackfoot and Cree behaviour at the time also suggests that relations remained stable. Siksika trading parties commonly arrived at fur trade posts in small groups. They evidently often wintered near fur trade posts, and even north of the North

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[78] This is an interpretation made on the basis of evidence that fur traders had known this younger man as "Feathers" or "Painted Feathers," and continued to refer to him by that name after 1794, probably to avoid confusing him with his father. Still, the Feather's Blackfoot name was given as "Akkomakki" which translates as "Old Swan," not "Feathers," HBCA B.39/a/2, fo. 98d. For a survey of the evidence of Old Swan's life see Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands."

[79] Old Swan evidently pursued a confrontational policy towards Euroamerican traders before 1794, see Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 50 and Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man and the Siksika Bands, 20-1.

[80] There is, however, good reason to accept Harmon's general statement that "all neighbouring tribes frequently intermarry"; Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country,* 215.

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[81] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 57, 213; Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 267; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals*, 65, 67, 142; Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 396.

[82] In 18 August 1803 Harmon mentioned that Cree and Assiniboine of the Swan River district were attempting to make peace with the Atsina and Siksika after protracted warfare; Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 69. The evidence from the North Saskatchewan River journals would suggest that the Atsina were the primary targets of this warfare, but Harmon's reference to the Siksika must refer to Big Man's bands.

[83] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 60-1. A similarly vague reference can be found in Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 10 March 1800.

[84] HBCA B.24/a/4, George Sutherland (Edmonton House) to Peter Fidler (Buckingham House) 12 December 1796.

Saskatchewan River.[85] Meanwhile, some Cree bands wintered at bison pounds south of the river.[86] The clear evidence that Cree and Siksika bands mingled in the parkland region, and the lack of evidence of substantial conflict, suggests that the generally amicable relations continued.

Clearly then, the paths of the Blackfoot and the Atsina diverged significantly in the 1790s. Despite occasional hostile incidents, the Blackfoot had generally cordial relationship with the Cree and Assiniboine, and they had easy access to fur trade posts. Their only real enemies were their militarily weak neighbours to the south. In contrast, the Atsina had continuously hostile relations with their Cree and Assiniboine rivals. It is understandable, then, that ties between the Blackfoot and the Atsina loosened during these years.

Even as the relationship between the Blackfoot and Atsina became more distant, the lifestyle of the Sarcee increasingly resembled that of the Blackfoot. After migrating southward from their Beaver kin in the southern boreal forests and becoming known as proficient beaver hunters in the 1780s, the Sarcee became increasingly oriented to the plains. Peter Fidler noted passing a Sarcee bison pound near the Battle River in 1793.[87] The most telling evidence of the Sarcee adaptation, however is Tomison's discussion of a Sarcee band that traded at Edmonton House in early 1798. He complained that they

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[85] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 21 February 1800, 19 February 1800.

[86] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 118 & 133.

[87] HBCA E.3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," 14 March 1793.

"have brought but little provisions and not above 200 wolves, and those very Indians used to bring above 1000 parchment beaver."[88] This Sarcee band was still associated with Cree bands, but as the Sarcee bands became more oriented towards the plains, their affiliations with the Blackfoot bands also probably grew.

Fur Traders and Natives

The relationships between the plains bands and the Euroamerican fur traders can be understood and explained adequately only in the context of political, economic, and military trends on the northwestern plains. Thus, the instability of the northern coalition inevitably affected fur traders. The plains bands that had the most acrimonious relations with the Cree and Assiniboine were also most aggressive towards the fur traders. The fur traders understood this fact acutely after 1794, and despite their efforts to act as peace brokers, they were unable to influence significantly the relations among Native bands.

When plains Natives made their initial contacts with Euroamericans, they were apparently very impressed with the newcomers. The fact that the Blackfoot used the term *Napikwan* (Oldman person), which suggests a connection to *Napi*, the Blackfoot Creator, to refer to Euroamericans suggests that the Blackfoot initially connected the newcomers with their cultural hero, although it does not mean that the Blackfoot worshiped these men.[89] Still, of the elder Old Swan who died in 1794 McGillivray wrote "his intentions towards the white people have been always honest and upright, and while he retained any authority his band never attempted anything to our prejudice."[90] As the generation of plains Native leaders that had originally made contact with Euroamericans died, however, any deference towards the Euroamericans also disappeared. During the 1790s, the Blackfoot still appeared to believe that the Euroamericans had certain exceptional powers, but they evidently dismissed any connection between the *Napikwan* and *Napi*. Furthermore, while the plains Natives understood that Euroamericans remained tremendously important as purveyors of valuable goods, they also soon perceived that these Euroamericans wielded very little power. There was little that could engender symbiotic relationships between plains Natives and these fur traders. Daniel Williams Harmon expressed the fur traders' consensus well when he wrote that "those Indians who reside in the large Plains are the most independent and appear to be the happiest and most contented of any People upon the face of the Earth. They subsist on the Flesh of the Baffaloe and of their Skins they make the greater part of their Clothing, which is both warm and convenient."[91] Under these conditions the plains bands clearly soon understood that deference towards the Euroamericans was not necessarily their most advantageous approach.

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[88] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 12 February 1798.

[89] Since *Napi* was neither omnipotent nor always benevolent, the Blackfoot were ambivalent about him. See Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," 12. Documentary evidence about initial contacts between Euroamericans and Natives of the northwestern plains is scant, thus firm conclusions are impossible. For a stimulating discussion of initial contacts in other regions see Trigger, "Early Native North American

For their part, Euroamerican traders placed relatively little value upon the trade of plains Natives when compared to the trade of "thickwoods Indians." The market for wolf

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Responses to European Contact," 1195-1215.

[90] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 50.

[91] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 73

skins was far less important than the market for beaver and fancy furs. The HBC standard for wolf furs, which had stood at 2 MB until 1789 fell to ½ MB in 1800. Furthermore, the Governor and Committee asked its traders to trade as few wolf furs as possible when it reduced the standard in 1800. There were good reasons for the changes; a high import duty and low prices on the market made it impossible for the HBC to profit from the trade in wolf furs.[92] Still, the change inspired resentment and suspicion from the plains bands.[93]

Not surprisingly then, the relationships between the fur traders and Blackfoot and Atsina bands tended to grow more distant in the 1780s and 1790s. Curiously, the Blackfoot and Atsina were far less likely to raid the fur traders' horse herds than were the Cree and Assiniboine (particularly the Assiniboine). Moreover, the relationship between fur traders and Cree and Assiniboine individuals was marred with violent incidents,[94] Still, the fact that the Cree and Assiniboine provided the most valuable furs and many essential services established a symbiotic relationship between their bands and the fur traders. Many Euroamerican traders spoke Cree and Assiniboine and intermarried with

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[92] Regarding the price of wolf furs see HBCA A. 6/16, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 31 May 1799 (fo. 78). Regarding the high duty (7 pence per skin) and the order to reduce the trading standard, see HBCA A.6/16, Governor and Committee to John Ballenden and Council at York Factory, 28 May 1800, (fo. 104). The general recovery in fur prices over the next few years did not include wolf, HBCA A. 6/17, Governor and Committee to John McNab and Council at York Factory, 31 May 1806 (fo. 77d).

[93] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, lxxix, citing B.49/c/1, fo. 1.

[94] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals*, 163.

Cree and Assiniboine bands. Blackfoot and Atsina women often had sexual relations with fur traders when their bands were visiting the posts, but they rarely intermarried with the traders. Relatively few traders understood the Blackfoot language, and none learned Atsina.[95] Fur traders were much less likely to give goods on credit to Blackfoot and Atsina men than they were to give credit to the Cree and Assiniboine. After the attacks of plains bands upon fur traders in the early 1790s, attacks which the fur traders had not anticipated, traders took greater precautions against the plains bands. When the HBC built Edmonton House in 1795, they equipped it with a musquetoon as a matter of course.[96] If the fur traders grew increasingly suspicious of the plains bands, the feelings were mutual. In 1803 Daniel Williams Harmon noted that the Atsina, who viewed the Cree and Assiniboine as their enemies, "look upon us as there [*sic*] enemies also, for furnishing the Crees & Assiniboines with fire arms, while they have few or none, having as yet had but little intercourse with the White People."[97]

Whether or not the plains bands sought a closer relationship with fur traders, many quickly became willing to make the most of their distant relationship. The lack of close relations with or of debts to fur traders meant that plains bands felt free of the reciprocal obligations that tied other bands to fur traders. Plains bands and fur traders recognized that plains bands and their leaders were not typically attached to particular companies or posts. The relationship meant that already in the 1780s, but increasingly during the 1790s, plains bands often behaved aggressively towards traders. The approach of Big Man's Siksika bands illustrates this approach. These bands often employed relentless bargaining, intimidation, and outright theft to lower their costs of acquiring Euroamerican goods.[98] Trading relations existed, but there was little trust between Blackfoot or Atsina bands and the fur traders.

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[95] Even as late as 1797 James Gaddy Sr. was described as "the only One [in the HBC] that Speaks the Blackfoot & Blood Indian Language"; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 9n.

[96] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 23 January 1796.

[97] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in Indian Country*, 30 July 1803.

Some more conciliatory Blackfoot bands, like the Siksika bands led by Old Swan, did seek cooperative relationships with the traders. Perhaps this was because these bands resided near fur trade posts and Cree and Assiniboine bands. By 1800 Old Swan's Siksika bands had forged relationships with fur traders and with Cree and Assiniboine bands that exhibited a remarkable degree of trust. Whatever the reason for the different approaches, the existence among the Blackfoot and Atsina of both the more aggressive bands and these more conciliatory bands directly influenced the development of the fur trade on the northwestern plains. The cooperation and services of Old Swan's bands were essential to the establishment and operation of Chesterfield House but the resistance of more aggressive bands contributed to the eventual decision to abandon it.[99]

Fur traders had every reason to seek peace among the Natives of the northwestern plains, and thus they presented themselves as peace brokers. Peter Fidler expressed well why the fur traders disapproved of Native warfare. After noting that the young men of the Siksika had departed on one of their frequent war expeditions, he noted "the above circumstance will be a great loss in trade at this house this year as the young men kill nearly all the furs the Indians have to trade. The old men does nothing but kill meat and spend their time in the tents in play and other acts of indolence, and cannot persuade themselves to be the least industrious."[100] Fur traders could not broker peace between unwilling belligerents, but they did contribute noticeably to peace agreements among those bands amenable to such arrangements. Although fur trade records of this period offer no explicit evidence that fur trade posts acted as neutral ground, they evidently did. Fur trade posts were far more likely to be the site of fratricidal violence than interethnic battles. Moreover, already in these years Native communities brought peace overtures to other communities by channeling them through fur trade establishments. Fur traders embraced their role as mediators by relaying these messages to other communities. When they could they also warned bands of the hostile intentions of other communities. Euroamerican fur traders's strenuous efforts to remain neutral when their clients fought neither prevented hostilities nor prevented fur traders from becoming embroiled in them, but they did apparently establish these traders in the minds of Natives as legitimate intermediaries, and they did ensure that fur trade posts rarely became the site of warfare.

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[98] See Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," 16-20.

[99] The foregoing discussion is derived from a more elaborate discussion provided in Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," *passim*.

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[100] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 8 January 1802.

The Dominance of the Northern Coalition

It was precisely in the years when the Blackfoot peace with the Cree and Assiniboine bands held and when the Blackfoot could still prevent significant trade between Euroamericans and their militarily weak southern neighbours, that the might of the Blackfoot bands reached its height. The reports of Euroamericans show that the Blackfoot raided their southwestern neighbours with near impunity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In 1809 Alexander Henry the Younger described the Blackfoot as "great Warriors, and so eas[il]y prey on their enemies that many of the old men among the Blackfeet [Siksika] have killed with their own hands during their younger days from 15 to 20 Men. ... He is considered but a moderate Warrior that had killed but 10 Men."[101] Success in warfare was critical for the ambitious young man. Henry noted that a man's status depended on the number of scalps he had taken.[102] According to Peter Fidler, those who had never killed an enemy were "looked upon by their Country men little better than Old Women."[103]

It may well be that the Blackfoot dominance of the northwestern plains reached its apogee between 1800 and 1805, for it was in those years that they needed travel no farther north than Chesterfield House or Rocky Mountain House to trade with Euroamericans. These posts facilitated Blackfoot dominance since the Blackfoot could and did use these posts as staging grounds for winter-time raids upon their enemies. Indeed, the stockades of Chesterfield House were not yet completed in the fall of 1800 when fifty Siksika visited Chesterfield House on their way to wage war on the Shoshoni.[104] Forty more warriors passed through on 20 November as the HBC traders were laying the guardroom floor of their post. By the time the Fidler reported that "we have entirely finished our house" on 1 December he also observed that "nearly all" the Siksika young men were gone to war against the Shoshoni.[105] The Chesterfield House journals for the 1800-01 and 1801-02 winters show that Blackfoot raids towards the south were common throughout those winters.[106] Given that summer was the principal season for warfare, this level of warfare in winter is remarkable.

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[101] Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 378-9.

[102] Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 540.

[103] HBCA B. 34/a.2, December 19, 1800.

Maps produced by Siksika men affiliated with Old Swan's bands and by an Atsina man[107] provide valuable information about the northwestern plains at the height of Blackfoot dominance. The maps reveal that the Blackfoot had detailed knowledge of the geography of the entire northwestern plains and beyond particularly towards the southwest and west. The Atsina were oriented towards the south. The Atsina map depicted the western plains as far south as New Mexico. The Siksika map uses Atsina names for rivers and features south of the Missouri River suggesting that the Blackfoot in 1800 had only recently become familiar with that region, and then only with the guidance of the Atsina, whose kin connections with the Arapaho ensured that they were more oriented towards the south. This evidence in turn reinforces the impression that the Blackfoot dominance expanded southward during these years. The accuracy of the Siksika maps, and the fact that the Blackfoot made forays to the very southern limits of the northwestern plains testifies to the military dominance of the northern coalition. Old Swan's 1801 map of the northwestern plains reveals that at the turn of the nineteenth century non-Blackfoot bands were still excluded from the western foothills region as they had been since the smallpox epidemic of 1782. The map also shows that, with the exception of hunting or warring parties, the Shoshoni bands were restricted to the upper Missouri basin beyond the open plains, and to the valleys west of the Rocky Mountains. Even there they were subject to attack, even in winter. Old Swan traced the path of a Siksika war party that left Chesterfield House on 22 November 1800 and returned on 10 January 1801. That expedition travelled beyond the three forks of the Missouri in an unsuccessful search for Shoshoni victims. Old Swan's map shows that the Crow and Arapaho bands were somewhat more secure on the plains. Their bands wintered in the upper Musselshell basin and in the middle reaches of the Yellowstone River near the Bighorn Mountains. The map indicates the presence of "Mud House" people (either Hidatsa or Crow) near the confluence of the Judith and Missouri Rivers[108] but it clearly shows that the vast region between the South Saskatchewan River and the Missouri River (and beyond) was a war zone that was not permanently occupied by any bands, but dominated militarily by the Blackfoot.[109]

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[104] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 1 November 1800.

[105] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 278.

[106] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 27 December 1800, 27 February 1801, 8 January 1802, 25 January 1802.

[107] See the Appendix entitled "Blackfoot and Atsina Maps, 1801."

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[108] Some have been led to assume that these "Mud House Indians" were Hidatsa and that Old Swan misplaced the village on the map; Moodie and Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," 6. In 1802 however, Charles Le Raye encountered Crow winter camps "sunk three feet below the surface of the ground, but otherwise are built nearly similar to those of the Gros Ventres [Hidatsa]"; Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 172. Clearly, mud house villages were still to be found well above the Hidatsa villages. Thus, Old Swan probably did not misplace the village on the map, but was probably noting the

The Southern Coalition

Even as the southern bands endured continual raids from the Blackfoot, they faced another disaster — the return of smallpox. Unlike the epidemic of the 1780s which seems to have spared no ethnic group, this epidemic did not affect the Blackfoot, Cree, and Assiniboine. Thus, this epidemic further weakened the position of the southern coalition against the northern. Although the diffusion pattern of this epidemic is no easier to determine than that of the epidemic of the 1780s it is clear that the disease spread northward on the Great Plains. It may have originated in Mexico[110] although the Arapaho reported contracting the disease from other Natives that traded with

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site of a Crow (or Hidatsa) winter camp. On their trips up and down the Missouri River in 1805 and 1806 Lewis and Clark saw abandoned camps of various descriptions (although they do not mention mud houses) almost daily, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, passim*. They saw two abandoned encampments (including one of 126 lodges) at the confluence of the Missouri and Judith Rivers, suggesting that this location was an important Native camp site, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 29 May 1805 (4: 216, 219).

[109] The Blackfoot clearly dominated the fescue belt well into the Missouri basin. Meriwether Lewis, aside from his meeting with the Peigan in the Marias basin in 1806, also saw ample evidence of Peigan winter camps, and summer camps near that river; Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 25 July 1806 (8: 127).

[110] Cooper found that Mexico City was hit by smallpox in 1797-8; Cooper, *Epidemic Disease in New Mexico*, 86-156.

Euroamericans on the lower Missouri River.[111] They in turn, during the summer of 1801, communicated the disease to their Atsina kin while visiting them in the South Saskatchewan River basin. The Crow also suffered from smallpox in 1801. The disease reduced their numbers to 2400 people living in 300 tents.[112] The Crow then apparently communicated smallpox to the Flathead.[113] From there the disease spread to Native groups throughout the Columbia basin, but did not spread north beyond the Atsina. Thus, the epidemic of 1801 further weakened the most vulnerable groups on the northwestern plains while sparing the most powerful.

The frequent interactions among the bands of the southern coalition must have facilitated the spread of the smallpox epidemic in 1801 for the southern bands were united by more than their hatred and fear of the Blackfoot, although that must have been a powerful unifying force among them. The southern bands were very diverse. The Crow, for example, were Siouan speakers with kin among the Hidatsa. The Numic-speaking Shoshoni were more oriented towards their kin who had trading relations with the New Mexicans. The Flathead had a lifestyle much like many of their Salishan kin, and had important trading relations with Native groups to their west. Still, their longstanding and significant trade ties, combined with their general amity, were sufficient to describe them as a coalition.[114] As always, one must assume that relationships among these groups were punctuated by violent incidents. Evidence of Shoshoni-Blackfoot raids on Crow bands have already been discussed. As we shall see, the Atsina participated in Crow raids on the Shoshoni. In 1802 Charles Le Raye noted that the "Nootsa-pah-zasah" Crow bands had raided the Flathead taking scalps and prisoners.[115] Despite their occasional skirmishes, the various groups appear to have maintained generally peaceful trading relations that tied them together symbiotically.[116]

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[111] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 294. The Dakota were hit by smallpox in that year, Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics," 295.

[112] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 206. Thus, they consisted of 600 warriors after the epidemic. Larocque explained that the Crow had numbered 2000 lodges, but this was apparently before the epidemic of the 1780s. The mortality of the 1801 epidemic is not clearly given.

[113] Teit, "Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus," 315.

Although the Flathead lacked direct access to Euroamerican fur traders, they were not minor partners in the trade network that linked the southern bands. The mild climate and abundant grasses of the Columbia basin made that region a horse nursery. François-Antoine Larocque reported in 1805 that the Flathead traded their surplus horses, and other products, including bows made from deer antlers. In return, the Crow supplied the Flathead with goods acquired at the Mandan/Hidatsa villages.[117] Meanwhile, the Shoshoni acquired Euroamerican goods via their kin who "have dealings with the white[s] of New Mexico from whom they get thick striped *Blankets*, Bridles & Battle axes in exchange for Buffaloe robes and Deer skins,"[118] but "what they get in this way is very trifling and cannot answer their purposes."[119] The Shoshoni traded some of these goods (like blue beads),[120] as well as goods (like shells) they acquired from their western neighbours,[121] and resources from their own territories (like obsidian) to their neighbours on the northwestern plains. By 1800, however, the Crow had the most valuable trading connections of the southern bands. Although the Mandan and Hidatsa had been decimated by disease and war by 1800, their importance to the residents of the northwestern plains only grew as the availability of Euroamerican goods at their villages improved.[122] The Crow carried out a very substantial trade with their kin at the Middle Missouri villages. They annually sold many of the horses they acquired from the Flathead at these villages "at duble [*sic*] the price they purchase them and carry on a continual trade in that manner."[123] The Hidatsa also sought the leather goods, robes, dried meat, and slaves that the Crow could supply. The Crow received in return Euroamerican and Hidatsa products like guns and ammunition, kettles, axes, corn, pumpkins, and tobacco.[124] The Crow also escorted Shoshoni and Flathead traders to the Middle Missouri villages just as they were escorted to trade fairs to the south.[125] Combined then, the southern bands had extensive and valuable trading networks, an abundance of horses, and excellent Native weaponry. Their great deficiency remained their shortage of Euroamerican metal and weaponry, and this deficiency significantly affected their fortunes in these years.

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[114] Not surprisingly, members of different ethnic groups could be found camping together. For example, in 1805 some Shoshoni lived with a Crow band, apparently on a long-term basis; Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 170, 220.

[115] Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 173.

[116] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 220.

[117] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 219. The Flathead almost certainly also would have traded products like dentalium shells that they acquired from their western neighbours at the time; Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 219.

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[118] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 220.

[119] Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 26 July 1806. Also see Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 14 August 1805 (5: 91).

[120] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 217, 220. Apparently, the Shoshoni placed a great value on these beads, demanding a horse from Larocque in exchange for a hundred of them; Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 192.

[121] Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 17 August 1805 (5: 114).

[122] The Mandan and Hidatsa villages, which had been consolidated at Knife River after the smallpox of the 1780s, probably had fewer than 4000 people in 1800; Wood, ed.,*Papers in Northern Plains Prehistory*, 18.

[123] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 213. While Larocque was apparently impressed by the profits of the Crow, Alexander Henry the Younger, when witnessing the trade at the Hidatsa villages remarked that "it was really

Because of their more secure access to European weaponry, the Crow bands were the most secure and dominant bands among the southern bands at the turn of the nineteenth century.[126] The Crow, in contrast to the other southern bands, remained in the bison realm all year. In fact, historical documents from the 1790s and the first decade of the 1800s consistently identify the Yellowstone Valley as the home territory of the

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disgusting to see how those impious vagabonds the Big Bellies kept those poor inoffensive Crow Indians in subjection, during their stay at the Villages, making their own price for their horses, and every other they bring, nor will they allow a stranger to give the real value of their commodities"; Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 27 July 1806. Alexander Henry, of course, was considering that the Hidatsa themselves resold their horses at considerably higher prices. For a discussion of Hidatsa horse trading practices in these years, see Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 65-7.

[124] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 215, 170, 246; Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 26 July 1806.

[125] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 170; Gough, *Alexander Henry the Younger's Journal*, 26 & 27 July 1806.

[126] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 170.

Crow.[127] Their ability to remain in this favoured region was probably related to the fact that the Crow were better armed than the other southern bands. Although they were not as wealthy in horses as the Flathead their horse herds were more than adequate. By 1805 most Crow men owned at least ten horses and many had thirty or forty — horses of which they were very fond, and of which they took good care.[128] They were also clearly excellent horsemen.[129] At least as important, in the early nineteenth century, Crow gun ownership approached what they themselves appear to have believed was a critical threshold. When Charles Le Raye visited the Crow on the upper Yellowstone and lower Bighorn Valleys in 1802 he reported that many of the Crow had guns but no ammunition.[130] According to François-Antoine Larocque who visited them in the same area only three years later, the Crow had long refused to trade guns and ammunition with their neighbours, "but this year as they have plenty they intend giving them some."[131] He described their weapons in 1805 as consisting of bow and arrow, lance, war club, shield, and gun.[132] He considered the Crow poor marksmen with guns because of their past inability to practice with scarce ammunition, but he regarded them excellent marksmen with bow and arrow.[133] Given that they retained their favourite lands, it is not surprising that Larocque believed that the Crow only engaged in defensive war at the time.[134] According to Larocque, at least after the epidemic of 1801 decimated their population, the Crow would camp together for protection during the seasons when they feared an attack by the Blackfoot.[135] According to Charles McKenzie, however, the Crow in 1805 were divided into two "tribes" that he identified as the Kegh-chy-sa (led by *Nakesinia* or "Red Calf" who hosted Larocque in 1805) and the Hey-re-ro-ka (led by Red Fish.) Together, they could raise a formidable six hundred warriors.[136]

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[127] Compare Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 160-1, with Old Swan's map of 1801.

[128] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 213.

[129] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 245.

[130] Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 170, 175.

[131] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 213.

[132] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 213, 245.

Dominant on the northwestern plains only sixty years earlier, the Shoshoni by 1800 were confined largely to the mountainous margins of the northwestern plains.[137] Although still the primary conduit of Euroamerican goods from New Mexico to the northwestern plains, the Shoshoni by the beginning of the nineteenth century were considerably weaker than the Crow. Indeed, they were subject to Blackfoot raids even west of the mountains. As a result, according to Le Raye, "this nation resides principally on the headwaters of the Big Horn river, and in the most inaccessible parts of the Rocky mountains, where they have frequently to hide in caverns from their enemies. Owing to their defenseless situation they become an easy conquest to any nation disposed to attack them, and they are frequently attacked for no other reason than the pleasure of killing them."[138] Le Raye described the weaponry of the Snake in 1802 as consisting of a war club, shield, a ten-inch bone dagger, and small bows.[139] Some Shoshoni men however, were armed with Euroamerican weapons. A Shoshoni war party defeated by the Siksika in 1802 had two guns manufactured in 1790 and originally brought to the plains by the HBC. The Shoshoni party also had enough shot and powder to use the gun, wounding one of the Siksika men with it.[140] Still, in their ability to wage war, the Shoshoni could not compete with the Blackfoot, Cree, or Assiniboine.

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[133] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 213.

[134] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 213. The lack of references in the HBC documents of Crow raids on the northern coalition at this time, suggest that Larocque was correct.

[135] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 206.

[136] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 245, 248.

[137] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 219-20.

Poorly armed, the Shoshoni bands were forced to subsist in the salmon realm or in the grassy valleys on the margins of the northwestern plains for much of the year. In August of 1805, the members of the Lewis and Clark expedition encountered a Shoshoni band in "extreem [*sic*] poverty" who were crossing from the Lemhi River into the Missouri basin. These Shoshoni, Lewis explained, subsisted on salmon but

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[138] Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 13 October 1802. Patrick Gass, a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, concurred with the common assessments of the poverty of the Shoshoni, but attributed the attacks upon them to different motives. He found the Shoshoni "the poorest and most miserable nation I ever beheld; having scarcely any thing to subsist on, except berries and a few fish, which they contrive by some means, to take. They have a great many fine horses, and nothing more; and on account of these they are much harassed by other nations"; Moulton, *The Journal of Patrick Gass* Vol. 10 *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 20 August 1805 (10: 128).

[139] Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 174. Lewis and Clark similarly described the arms of the Shoshoni as consisting of bow and arrow, shield, lances and "pog-gar'-mag-gon'" (war club), Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 19 August 1805 (5: 122).

[140] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 25 January 1802; HBCA B.39/a/2, 25 January 1802. In the summer of 1805 Lewis and Clark saw a few NWC guns among Shoshoni bands. The Shoshoni had acquired them from the Crow; Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 13 August 1805 (5: 80).

> as this firsh [*sic*] either perishes or returns about the 1st of September they are compelled at this season in surch [*sic*] of subsistence to resort to the Missouri, in the vallies [*sic*] of which, there is more game even within the mountains. here they move slowly down the river in order to collect and join other bands either of their own nation or the Flatheads, and having become sufficiently strong as they conceive venture on the Eastern side of the Rockey [*sic*] mountains into the plains, where the buffaloe [*sic*] abound. but they never leave the interior of the mountains while they can obtain a scanty subsistence, and always return as soon as they have acquired a good stock of dryed [*sic*] meat in the plains; thus alternately obtaining food at the risk of their lives and retiring to the mountains, while they consume it.[141]

Defenceless as they supposedly were, the Shoshoni still launched raids against the Blackfoot even into the Saskatchewan basin as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century. For instance, in the winter of 1801-02 the Siksika discovered a party of Shoshoni horse raiders just a day's journey south of the Cypress Hills.[142] During the same winter the Siksika killed eight members of a party of ten Shoshoni horse raiders apparently on the South Saskatchewan River only forty miles from Chesterfield House.[143] It is impossible to know why the Shoshoni launched these attacks against long odds. Perhaps older Shoshoni men and women who remembered the years of Shoshoni dominance spurred and shamed their young men to action. Nevertheless the Blackfoot showed little fear of the Shoshoni at the turn of the nineteenth century.

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[141] Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 19 August 1805 (5: 123). The reference to "extreem poverty" is in Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 19 August 1805 (5:119).

[142] The Siksika killed four of the five Shoshoni in the party; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 8 January 1802.

[143] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 25 January 1802.

The Flathead who lived in the mild and open environment of the Bitterroot and Flathead Valleys had abundant horse herds but their territory supported few, if any bison. The bison herds that had lived west of the Rocky Mountains in the pedestrian era were extirpated by the nineteenth century.[144] Indeed, the fact that many bands depended on the bison of only a small area resulted in local exhaustion of the herds. The herds of the mountainous upper Missouri River basin diminished noticeably around the turn of the nineteenth century.[145] Thus, when they were west of the mountains, the Flathead depended on deer and fish, primarily salmon. Perhaps the extermination of the transmountain bison herds induced Flathead bands to accept the risks and travel to the plains. They did habitually cross the mountains seasonally to hunt bison in the upper Missouri basin and to visit and trade with other southern bands. For example, in 1800 David Thompson reported that the Flathead ventured east of the mountains to hunt, and even to steal horses and attack any small vulnerable camp of Peigan.[146] Charles Le Raye similarly suggested that the Flathead crossed the mountains to hunt bison in 1802.[147] François-Antoine Larocque reported that the Flathead by 1804 were residing almost solely on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, but that "they come every fall to the fort [fork?] of the Missouri or thereabouts to kill Buffaloes of which there are none across that range of Mountains, dress Robes, dry meat with which the[y] return as soon as the winter sets in."[148] Euroamerican trade goods were rare among the Flathead before 1805; their weaponry consisted of bows, often made of animal antlers, and projectiles that were primarily bone tipped, but were probably augmented by some metal tips that were fashioned from metal kettles they acquired from the Crow.[149]

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[144] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 218-9. Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 14 August 1805 (5: 91). Meriwether Lewis, however, reported that bison could be found very near the Great Divide in the upper Missouri basin, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 7 July 1806 (8: 96).

[145] Bird Woman told William Clark that only a few years earlier the bison had been abundant well above the Three Forks of the Missouri; Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 14 July 1806 (8: 182). By 1805 and 1806, however, they were rare there, despite the fine grasses that these valleys supported, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, passim*, but see especially 8 August 1805 (5: 58).

[146] Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 224.

While the Flathead appear to have raided the Peigan only rarely, their northern neigbours, the Kutenai, never did. The Kutenai by the turn of the nineteenth century were a small and militarily weak group residing nearly permanently west of the Rocky Mountains. Their access to Euroamerican goods, and thus their ability to exploit the resources of the northwestern plains, remained exceedingly tenuous. By 1800, when two illiterate Canadians, who David Thompson identified only as La Gassi and Le Blanc,[150] visited with them, the Kutenai bands who formerly lived east of the Rocky Mountains, now wintered in the "in the fine open country" of the upper Kootenay River region. From there it was an arduous and dangerous seventeen day journey to Rocky Mountain House. The Kutenai "principal subsistence is upon the Jumping Deer a small animal[. T]hey are numerous but not easily approached to kill them." The Canadian visitors reported that the Kutenai band frequently went hungry, and thus during the winter "they passed over the mountain to kill Buffalo there & remained 14 Days killing a sufficient stock — while they were doing this necessary business, some kept watch on the adjoining hills in case of a surprise by the muddy river Inds who are at this time declared & inveterate enemies." Notwithstanding this hunting expedition, the Kutenai ability to exploit the plains was much less than it had been. After many years of disuse, their former trails connecting the plains with the Rocky Mountain trench had become "very much encumbered with Wind fall wood &c." The mild winters of the Rocky Mountain trench supported many feral horses, but with horses being of little use in deer hunting, the Kutenai themselves owned relatively few. Neither, according to the Canadians, did their lands support many beaver.[151]

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[147] Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 175.

[148] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 219. Lewis and Clark similarly reported that Shoshoni and Flathead bands would gather in autumn near the three forks in order to hunt on the plains, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 18 August 1805 (5: 123).

[149] Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 175; Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 219.

[150] Hopwood, *David Thompson: Travels*, 221.

Although their important function as traders is acknowledged, the Hidatsa also participated in events on the northwestern plains more directly. By 1800 they appear to have enjoyed mostly friendly relations with their Crow kin, and these friendly relations, and their access to Euroamerican weaponry evidently allowed them to continue travelling to the upper Missouri basin even when the Cree and Assiniboine bands appear to have prevented them from travelling to the Assiniboine River basin.[152] On the northwestern plains, the Hidatsa fought with the Blackfoot, but also apparently with the Shoshoni. In 1805 the Hidatsa chief One Eye (Le Borgne) boasted that the Hidatsa took many scalps from the defenceless Shoshoni.[153] It is impossible to know how frequently Hidatsa parties travelled to the northwestern plains, but their involvement there had some very important consequences for the history of the region. Once, probably in 1800, a Hidatsa war party attacked a Shoshoni band at the three forks of the Missouri, killing at least ten people and taking several captives.[154] The captives, among them a girl named Bird Woman (Sacajewea), were brought back to the Hidatsa villages where Bird Woman eventually became the wife of the Canadian-born Toussaint Charbonneau. While she was still a teen, her husband, and her two-month old baby, accompanied Lewis and Clark on their famous expedition. As interpreter, Bird Woman was instrumental in establishing peaceful relations between Lewis and Clark and the hard-pressed Shoshoni.[155]

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[151] The foregoing account of the winter of 1800-01 is summarized from HBCA E.3/2 "Journal of a Journey over Land," fos. 19d-20.

The Hidatsa also delivered the death blow to HBC and NWC efforts at Chesterfield House. According to John McDonald of Garth, a "Missouri Indian" party came to Chesterfield House at Christmas 1804. They announced that, although they were enemies of the Blackfoot, they desired to trade at Chesterfield House. The Blackfoot, however, detected them and routed them the next day.[156] It may be this incident that Hidatsa leader, Wolf Chief, referred to when he told Charles McKenzie that his brother had been killed in the fall of 1804 when on a war expedition against the Blackfoot. At any rate, McKenzie noted that the Hidatsa "went soon after [in March 1805] with a party of fifty men to revenge his death — but not finding the Blackfeet Indians who were the aggressors, or rather having found them too numerous, the party wisely retraced their steps without making an attempt."[157] As they retraced their steps, they discovered the NWC traders from Chesterfield House who, during their trip down the South Saskatchewan River in the spring of 1805, had stopped to rendezvous with some plains Cree near the Moose Woods (about halfway between Chesterfield House and the forks of the Saskatchewan). The Hidatsa "attacked at day break, a volley was fired in Bouché's tent, where three men were in bed asleep, and all of them were killed."[158] The Hidatsa returned to their villages with several scalps and the possessions of the dead Euroamericans, as well as at least half a keg of gunpowder, at least 200 balls — "more," according to Larocque, "that ever I saw in the possession of Indians at one time."[159] The Hidatsa, in turn, traded some of these goods with the "Rocky Mountain Indians," (Crow).[160] Unknowingly, the Hidatsa had struck a significant blow to the Siksika. The vulnerable NWC and HBC traders at Chesterfield House had already suffered the depredations of the Atsina during the brief tenure of that post, and this Hidatsa attack appears to have convinced them to abandon Chesterfield House. The bands of the northern coalition were again forced to travel to the North Saskatchewan River posts for all their supplies in the very year the Crow bands departed the Middle Missouri villages exceptionally well supplied with European weaponry.

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[152] For a discussion of deteriorating relations between the Cree and Assiniboine bands and the Mandan and Hidatsa villagers see Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 47-58.

[153] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 247.

[154] Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 28 July 1805 (5: 8-9). Although other members of the expedition (like John Ordway and Joseph Whitehouse) estimated that this incident occurred in 1801 or 1802, Gary Moulton concurs that 1800 is the best guess, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 9: 191n.

[155] Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri*, 59.

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[156] McDonald, "Autobiographical Notes," 31-2.

[157] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 233.

[158] McDonald, "Autobiographical Notes," 34. McDonald implied that two other Canadians were also died in the attack. Lewis and Clark noted that the Hidatsa war party of about fifteen men had left the Middle Missouri villages in March 1805, Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 17 May 1805 (4: 159-60, 161). A description of this incident is also preserved in HBC documents, which note that Howse's party escaped harm because they had passed this point a few days earlier, B.239/a/111, 29 June 1805.

The Atsina 1794-1806

Following the Atsina and Siksika attacks on fur traders in 1793 and 1794, the lives of the Atsina would never be the same, but this was not primarily because of the fur traders themselves. The traders were unable to exact any significant revenge for the attacks.[161] The intense competition among fur trading concerns militated against the development of a common front against the Atsina. Without agreement among the traders, any trader who refused to deal with the belligerents merely compromised the short term economic interests of his company. Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that Euroamerican leaders and the Atsina quickly resumed trading relations. Indeed, in May 1795 the HBC Governor and Committee asked that "no means be lost in trying to reconcile those Natives with our Servants."[162] The Big Man's Siksika band which had been involved in the attack on Pine Island and Manchester House restored its relations with the traders in October and November 1794. Big Man and his band endured a tongue lashing and they returned some of the horses they had taken but did not pay a high price for their assaults.[163]

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[159] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 166. Larocque's report is supplemented by Charles McKenzie's on page 233.

[160] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 233.

[161] On rare occasions Canadian fur traders executed individual Natives in retaliation for their killing fur traders. For example, in 1796 a Native was executed at Fort George/Buckingham House in retaliation for killing a Canadian, HBCA B.49/a/27^b, 2 June 1796.

Despite reports that some of the Atsina belligerents had abandoned the Saskatchewan River region permanently, they too evidently restored their trading relations. Some of them evidently did go south, probably to their Arapaho kin, after the attacks, but they returned within a few years. Still, they were far more hesitant to approach the traders than Big Man's Siksika were. They did not visit posts again until the autumn of 1795.[164] On 25 November 1795, the very Atsina that had attacked Manchester House and South Branch House visited the half-constructed Fort Augustus and Edmonton House to sue for peace. The episode was apparently such a bitter disappointment to

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[162] HBCA A. 6/15, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 30 May 1795, (fo. 138d). The Governor and Committee was commenting on the attack on Manchester House and apparently had not yet learned of the South Branch House incident.

[163] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 32, 44-6. For a discussion see Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands," 16.

[164] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 73.

William Tomison that he omitted details of it in his post journal of that year.[165] When the band arrived, the irascible Tomison, whom John McDonald sarcastically described as "my old Friend," apparently decided he wanted to punish the Atsina for their attacks.[166] To that end he met with the NWC officers, John Hughes and John McDonald, explaining that "he could not receive them [the Atsina] as friends."[167] McDonald, therefore, visited the large Atsina encampment

> & with an Interpreter told them of Mr. Thompson's [*sic*] resolve. They loaded me with kindness & Buffaloe fur Robes — they had by this time pitched their tents. They told me they would willingly make peace & not molest the Hudson's Bay establisht, — but would trade all they had with me — & was glad that I met them without any fear of any harm — and I placed confidence in them.
>
> They accordingly came on & we made a good Trade. Mr. Thompson biting his fingers at the result.[168]

This incident illustrates how the competition among fur traders continually frustrated any attempts to punish attacks even of the magnitude of the South Branch House incident. The Atsina reconciled with the HBC during Tomison's year-long furlough in England in 1796-7. On a rainy 14 December 1796 four hundred Atsina arrived at Edmonton to reconcile with the HBC.[169] Officers of the HBC and NWC then reprimanded the Atsina and restored normal relations with them.[170] The response of the traders to the Native attacks of the 1790s accorded ill with established European practices, but conformed to old and established realities on the northwestern plains.

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[165] He mentions only the arrival of a large band of Atsina in the evening of that date, Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 25 November 1795.

[166] This was apparently an about-face for Tomison, for on 28 February Duncan M'Gillivray expressed his surprise that Tomison "seems to entertain but little resentment for those acts of barbarity and injustice," Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 57.

[167] John McDonald of Garth as quoted in Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, A-3.

[168] John McDonald of Garth as quoted in Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, A-3. Further discussion of the disputes that arose from this incident are contained in Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, xxxiii-xxxiv, citing and quoting HBCA B.239/b/57, fo. 26d and HBCA B.239/b/59, fos. 29-29d.

Since there was no basis for a symbiotic relationship, it would prove far more difficult for the Atsina to restore relations with the Cree and Assiniboine than it would be to do so with the traders. The devastating attacks of the Cree and Assiniboine in the late 1780s and early 1790s had incited the attacks on fur traders in the first place. The plunder the Atsina acquired in their attacks did not make them a formidable military power, and the Cree and Assiniboine bands' attacks on the Atsina appear to have continued without pause. The attacks probably intensified. In November 1794 Duncan M'Gillivray learned that a war party was being planned among the Cree "on an expedition against the Slave Indians."[171] While at Nipawi House, James Bird, in January 1795 noted that the seventy tents of the Saskatchewan, Red Deer (the Red Deer River that flows into Lake Winnipegosis) Swan, and Red Rivers were pounding bison in preparation for a war expedition against the Atsina.[172] In the spring of 1795 a Cree man was killed by the Atsina near Buffalo Lake.[173] Repeated bloodshed did not augur well for Atsina-Cree relations.

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[169] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 14 December 1796.

[170] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 16 December 1796.

[171] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, 39. M'Gillivray's use of the term "Slave" suggests that the expedition was aimed at more than just the Atsina. Big Man's Siksika bands would also have likely have been targets.

[172] HBCA B.148/a/1, 7 January 1795, and Letter from James Bird to William Tomison, 15 January 1795 (fo. 32).

David Thompson summed up the history of the Atsina in these years by suggesting that "their chief was of a bad character, and brought them into so many quarrels with their allies, they had to leave their country and wander to the right bank of the Missisourie, to near the Mandane villages."[174] "L'Homme de Callumet" (Pipe Man), one of the pre-eminent leaders of the Atsina shortly before 1794, was killed in the attack on South Branch House in 1794.[175] His brother, A kas kin, succeeded him as "great chief" but he and most of the other Atsina leaders at that time, appear to have been as bellicose as L'Homme de Callumet had been.[176] In 1801 Fidler wrote of A kas kin that "his character relating to his regard for Europeans are none of the best but on the contrary he is generally stirring his countrymen up against them."[177] The only Atsina leader that might have had the inclination to seek peace with the Cree and Assiniboine was Kate thak ki, but he does not appear to have sufficient influence within his own community to broker such a peace.[178] This apparent resistance to peace, however, may reflect the fact that the Atsina had few alternatives but defensive warfare. There was very little basis for a peace agreement between the Cree and Assiniboine bands and the Atsina. On their own, the Atsina were simply too small and vulnerable to sue for any peace on equal terms. The fur traders, who fancied themselves peace brokers, would have been understandably reluctant to act on behalf of the Atsina. Neither was there much incentive for any of the Blackfoot bands to put their weight behind the Atsina. Big Man's band may have cooperated with the Atsina in the past, but the aftermath of the attacks of 1793 appear to have undermined Big Man's influence even within his own bands.[179] Furthermore, Big Man's reputation was as a warrior, not a diplomat. Old Swan's band, which apparently continued to enjoy friendly relations with neighbouring Cree and Assiniboine bands, had every reason to distance themselves from the Atsina. Given the fragile peace that existed between the Blackfoot and the Plains Cree and Assiniboine, it is not surprising that the Atsina would be, for the time being, on their own.

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[173] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 78.

[174] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 327.

[175] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 14.

[176] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 6, 8 March 1802.

[177] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 29 October 1801.

[178] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 8 March 1802.

The continual warfare with the Cree and Assiniboine appears to have led the Atsina increasingly to withdraw towards the southwest. Given these circumstances, it would seem natural that the Atsina would have been more eager than any of the Blackfoot to have sought the success and longevity of Chesterfield House. The location of the post was very convenient for them. Not only was Chesterfield House near their wintering grounds, the establishment of the post ended the need for trips to posts on the North Saskatchewan River where the danger of conflicts with Cree and Assiniboine bands was great. The Atsina may very well have viewed the establishment of Chesterfield House this way during the first season. According to Peter Fidler, the Atsina consisted of about

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[179] Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray,* 46.

180 tents including about 600 warriors at the time.[180] Given their military weakness and their diplomatic isolation, it is not surprising that the Atsina were exceptionally eager to maximize their returns. Fidler reported that the Atsina produced proportionately more furs (especially fox furs) than the Siksika, and that they prepared their skins with greater care than did the Siksika.[181] The Atsina appear to have behaved very peacefully during their first winter at Chesterfield House.

The hope that the Chesterfield House posts might have offered the Atsina in 1800 proved to be illusory. The Atsina suffered tremendous reversals during 1801. In February two Atsina men were killed by a party of Siksika led by Old Swan's son only a day's journey from Chesterfield House. The party took 170 foxes.[182] The following October Old Swan gave the Atsina two horses to make up for the killings, but by that time the incident paled in comparison with a series of events that decimated the Atsina and their horse herds.[183] On 12 and 13 May 1801, after several weeks of warm weather, a sudden spring storm blanketed parts of the northwestern plains. The Atsina were in the upper South Saskatchewan Valley at the time but Fidler, at Moose Woods recorded "Snow without intermission for 2 days & nights & the Snow on the level was knee deep, much more than we saw the whole Winter, and the drifts in some places was more than 6 feet deep, we remained there 5 days on that account. The weather was not very cold all the time."[184] That spring blizzard killed over a hundred of the Atsina horses.[185] Far to the northeast Cree and Assiniboine bands already made plans to attack their Atsina enemies. At Fort Alexandria on the upper Assiniboine River at the beginning of June, Daniel Williams Harmon noted that he had the company of "a number of Women & Children belonging to the Natives, whose Husbands have gone to war upon the Rapid Indians (a Tribe who remain a considerable distance out into the large Plains and near the upper part of the Missisours [Missouri] River)."[186] When the war party returned in early September their blackened faces testified to their success. Two attacks of the Cree and Assiniboine during the summer left at least seventy four Atsina dead. The Cree killed forty-six in the first attack in the Cypress Hills. They killed twenty-eight more in the second attack in late August on the upper Oldman River near present-day Lethbridge. In all, fourteen men and sixty women and children were killed and well over a hundred horses were stolen.[187] Cruelly, during the same summer the Atsina contracted smallpox from their Arapaho kin. The disease killed at least a hundred of their young people.[188] If, as the documents say, the Atsina were in a desperate mood in the fall of 1801, the reasons are not difficult to understand. More bad news would greet the Atsina upon their arrival at Chesterfield House in the autumn of 1801. The HBC had lowered the standard on wolf skins to ½ MB in 1800,[189] but Peter Fidler evidently did not learn of this change until well into the trading season at Chesterfield House, apparently had not applied it during that season.[190] Beginning in the autumn of 1801, however, wolf furs were traded at ½MB at Chesterfield House.[191] There can have been little joy among the Atsina camps as they prepared for winter.

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[180] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 12 November 1800; HBCA E.3/2, 20 September 1800.

[181] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 1 December 1800.

[182] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 17 February 1801.

[183] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 299n.

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[184] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 290. That the Atsina would have been in the upper South Saskatchewan basin at this time is suggested by their announced intentions in Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 19 February and 2 March 1801, and the location of subsequent events.

[185] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 317n.

[186] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 1 June 1801.

[187] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 27 September 1801, 297n, 1 February 1802.

The autumn and winter offered little reason for renewed optimism. In October members of Big Man's band attacked a group of Arapaho who were visiting with their Atsina kin near Chesterfield House. A man, woman, and two children were killed.[192] Several times over the next year, Peter Fidler mentioned the tensions between the Atsina and some Siksika, once noting that Atsina hostility was aimed at Big Man's band specifically.[193]

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[188] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 294. The epidemic would have killed young people disproportionately because older members of the community would have acquired immunity from their exposure to the epidemic of 1781.

[189] Rich, *History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 2: 221, and Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, lxxix, citing HBCA A.6/16, p. 180.

[190] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 11 April 1801.

[191] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 319n.

[192] HBCA B.39/a/2, 28 October 1801.

On 27 January 1802 a sudden and ferocious winter storm struck, killing two Atsina men who had become disoriented near the camp.[194] Of this blizzard, Fidler wrote "This is the *worst day* I ever saw in this Country." "Strong gales, with the very great drift & snow — could not see 100 yards."[195] The storm, and the deep snow that it left behind, also claimed many horses. The Siksika reported that many of their horses died "on account of the great depth of snow, not being able to scrape the snow away and maintain themselves." Some of the HBC horses met the same fate.[196] Combined with the losses of the previous summer, the eighty Atsina horses killed by the storm left "them very ill off for them."[197]

Peter Fidler quickly understood the implications of these events for the traders at Chesterfield House. Within days of arriving at Chesterfield House Fidler noted that "The Fall Indians, on account of the war and disease this summer cutting off such number of them, appears desperate, and is nearly ready to fall on anyone they can."[198] During the next few days the aggressive behaviour of these Natives foreshadowed a tense winter. During the 1801-02 season at Chesterfield House, the Atsina were difficult to deal with.

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[193] HBCA B.39/a/2, 1 March 1802.

[194] HBCA B.39/a/2, 1 February 1802.

[195] HBCA B.39/a/2, 27 January 1802.

[196] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 9 February 1802.

[197] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 1 February 1802.

[198] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 3 October 1801.

Following the January blizzard, however, Fidler noted that "all these losses and misfortunes coming upon them so soon after each other has a great deal soured their dispositions, which before this late affair was nearly upon a balance whether to do good or bad."[199] The bloodshed began in February. Early in the morning of 21 February 1802 the men of the XYC post at Chesterfield House repulsed an attack of about seventy Atsina men. The traders were not yet aware, however, that the Atsina had already attacked and killed several Iroquois nearby.

Four Canadians and fourteen Iroquois connected with the NWC travelled up the South Saskatchewan River during the winter of 1801-02 intending to trap in the Cypress Hills. On 19 February 1802 four of the Iroquois and two Canadians went ahead to make the acquaintance of the local bands. Old Swan's Siksika band welcomed them as friends but on 19 February 1802 the Atsina killed two of the Iroquois near Chesterfield House. On the morning of 22 February, the Atsina killed the other two Iroquois after they left Old Swan's tent only four miles from Chesterfield House. They allowed the two Canadians to arrive safely at Chesterfield House.[200] The treatment of the bodies, including scalping, dismemberment, and mutilation suggests that the Atsina regarded these trappers as interlopers that they believed wanted to exploit the same source of furs that the Atsina relied upon.[201]

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[199] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 1 February 1802.

[200] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 21 February 1802; HBCA B.39/a/2, 22 February 1802.

[201] Feet, hands, noses, and private parts were cut off, and bellies were cut open, HBCA B.39/a/2, 25 February 1802.

Even after these killings the Atsina had only to promise to allow the other two Canadians and ten Iroquois to reach the posts safely before the Euroamericans traded with them. The situation became even more agitated when Big Man's band, which had avoided Chesterfield House since their run-in with the Atsina and Arapaho in the fall, happened to arrive on 1 March just as the entire Atsina, together with their Arapaho guests, were camped at Chesterfield House. Fidler noted that the Arapaho were "all assembled about the House with guns to kill some of the Big Mans gang in retaliation for the man & woman and 2 children last fall."[202] Big Man's band hastily traded their few furs and left. Then, in the early morning of 3 March 1802, two hundred Atsina attacked and killed the two Canadians and ten Iroquois sixteen miles from Chesterfield House. Again, they dismembered the bodies, but this time they paraded past the posts displaying the scalps on the end of poles and under their belts, threatening to treat the traders in the same way.[203] This incident convinced the thirty-seven inhabitants of the HBC and XYC posts to burn the XYC post and join together within one stockade.[204] The traders did not attempt to avenge the attacks because they knew they would be easy targets for the Atsina once they embarked downstream in the spring.[205] Instead, Fidler attempted to intimidate the Atsina by drawing upon his friendships with Siksika and the Peigan bands (some of whom arrived on 19 March), and by spreading rumours that the Cree and Assiniboine were planning to attack them in the summer. These measures apparently had the desired effect. Little Bear (Ki oo cuss), a Siksika leader who Fidler trusted, and who had attempted to mediate between the fur traders and the Atsina,[206] soon reported that "every Fall Indian with their families are pitched away for the Mis sis su rie River." Little Bear, however, also warned the traders that the Atsina intended "to meet the Crow Mountain and Tattood Indians, and make a very formidable party, and that they will then come to fall upon us and proceed down the country to find the Crees and Stone Indians and kill what they can of them in revenge of the last summer."[207] After the experiences of the 1801-2 season, and the warnings of the intentions of the Atsina, none of the fur trade companies appear to have returned to Chesterfield House until the autumn of 1804.

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[202] HBCA B.39/a/2, 1 March 1802.

[203] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 3 March 1802; HBCA B.39/a/2, 3 March 1802.

[204] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 3-4 March 1802; HBCA B.39/a/2, 4 March 1802.

[205] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 6 March 1802.

The suggestion that the Atsina and Arapaho might join with the Crow to attack the Cree and Assiniboine illustrates the Atsina's tenuous yet flexible position between the northern and southern coalition at the time. It also illustrates the convoluted paths that warfare and diplomacy took on the northwestern plains. The Atsina had generally friendly relations with Old Swan's band at Chesterfield House between 1800 and 1802, even as they bristled at Big Man's band. Thus, the Atsina had good relations with the very Siksika that maintained peaceful relations with their Cree and Assiniboine foes, while they were at odds with the Siksika who were hostile with the Cree and Assiniboine.

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[206] The available documentary evidence relating to Little Bear is summarized in Binnema, "Conflict or Cooperation?," 65-9.

[207] Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 15 April 1802.

During those same winters, however, Atsina men fought the Shoshoni, both by themselves, and in company with Crow war parties. The Atsina brought at least two captured Shoshoni girls to Chesterfield House after combined Atsina-Crow raids upon the Shoshoni.[208] In the spring of 1805 an Atsina party attacked Cameahwait's Shoshoni band near the three forks of the Missouri, killing twenty, taking several more prisoners, and taking many horses and all the Shoshoni lodges.[209] Clearly then, as hard-pressed as the Atsina were in these years, they and their Arapaho kin had a unique ability to interact peacefully with bands from the Yellowstone basin to the North Saskatchewan basin. In August and in October 1802, Charles Le Raye met "Paunched Indians" on the foothills of the upper Yellowstone River. According to Le Raye, these Natives many of whom had guns with no ammunition, lived on the upper Yellowstone and the Bighorn Rivers. Given that Le Raye clearly described them as separate from the Gros Ventre (his term for the Hidatsa) these were certainly Atsina-Arapaho.[210] In September 1805 Larocque witnessed a wary but peaceful meeting between a group of Atsina and a Crow band at the Yellowstone River near the site of present-day Billings, Montana. Some Shoshoni were also present. The Atsina he saw were representatives of a band of apparently 275 or 300 lodges that was camped in the Big Horn Basin.[211] According to Larocque, they "brought words of peace from their nation and say they came to trade horses. They were well received by the [Crow] Indians and presents of different articles were made them, they told me they had traded last winter with Mr. [John Mc]Donald [at Chesterfield House] whom they made known to me a[s] crooked arm."[212]

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[208] On 16 February 1801 about a hundred Atsina left Chesterfield House on a war expedition against the Shoshoni; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 16 February 1801. Peter Fidler bought a Shoshoni slave girl of about 6 years from the Atsina for 7 MB in 1801 but the Atsina wanted her back the next day; HBCA B.39/a/2, 6, 7 November 1801. On 18 February 1802 he bought a Shoshoni slave woman of nineteen years from a n Atsina man. This woman too, was captured with the Crow in warfare. Fidler was also asked to return her after one day; Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 311n.

[209] Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 13 August 1805, (5: 83).

[210] Le Raye, "The Journal of Charles Le Raye," 170, 175.

Any tentative affiliations between the Atsina and the Crow would have done nothing to soothe Atsina relations with the Cree and Assiniboine bands. Indeed, the evidence suggests that there were only brief periods of peace between the Cree and Assiniboine bands of the northeastern plains and the Atsina. In 18 August 1803, Daniel Williams Harmon at Fort Alexandria in the Assiniboine River basin, noted that forty lodges of Cree and Assiniboine with others had set off in the spring on a war party but had separated at the Battle River (half a month's journey) "to go and make Peace with their Enemies, the Rapid & Black Feet Indians, for both parties begin to be weary of such a bloody War as has for such a length of time been kept up between them, and are therefore much inclined to patch up a Peace on almost any terms whatever."[213] But less than three years later, while at South Branch House, Harmon noted that "the greater part of our Indians have gone to wage War upon the Rapid Indians, their inveterate enemies—with whom they often patch up a Peace, but is never of a long duration."[214] Seven days later he reported that the Atsina had killed several Assiniboine within fifteen miles of that fort.[215]

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[211] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 191.

[212] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 191. John McDonald of Garth was known as "bras croche" among voyagers because of his crippled right arm; Morton, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray*, xliv.

[213] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 18 August 1803. Less than a month before, Harmon had discovered the campsite of a recently abandoned Atsina war party. Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 30 July 1803.

By 1806 the northern coalition had been permanently fractured. The Atsina occupied a nebulous middle zone between the northern coalition, maintaining peaceful relations with some Blackfoot and Crow bands and with their Arapaho kin. Had peace between the Blackfoot and the Cree and Assiniboine survived much longer, the Atsina may well have been driven from the Saskatchewan River basin and affiliated with the southern coalition. The remnant northern coalition, however, was fragile. Symbiotic trading relations between Blackfoot bands and Cree and Assiniboines had evaporated in the 1780s. Peaceful relations survived thanks to established kin connections and amity among the bands and the efforts of Native diplomats and Euroamerican peace brokers. Still, irritants constantly weakened the relationship. Repeated Cree and Assiniboine raids on Blackfoot horse herds generated most of the friction. At the beginning of 1806, however, the Blackfoot-Cree-Assiniboine-Sarcee peace was intact.

Meanwhile, the southern coalition faced the repeated assaults of their powerful northern enemies. The southern bands were united by trading networks and by their common dread of the northern bands. By 1806 many of them hunted the bison of the northern plains only seasonally, and then at considerable risk. The Crow bands were the most secure of the southern bands. They continued to reside in the Yellowstone River basin, but their hunting parties too dreaded their well armed foes. At the beginning of 1806 the southern bands could have harboured little hope that their situation would soon improve. However, in 1806 circumstances throughout the northwestern plains changed dramatically.

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[214] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 19 April 1806. The NWC had reestablished South Branch House in the summer of 1804, Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 21 September 1805. From 1805 to 1810 the HBC's Carlton House was located at the site of old South Branch House as well.

[215] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 28 April 1806.

Epilogue

> Point out to them [the Blackfoot] as forcibly as possible the necessity there is of their being on a friendly footing with the Southward [Cree] Indians for to have a safe & easy Intercourse with us and above all that if they value our Friendship & assistance it will always be necessary for them whatever Quarrels may arise among the Indians, to consider us a party unconcerned, Friends to all, sorry for their dissentions [*sic*] and at all time willing to do everything in our power to compose them.
>
> James Bird to J.P. Pruden, 28 January 1807[1]

> A party of Americans were seen last Summer where the Missoury enters the rocky Mountain & this resisted by the Muddy or Missoury River Indians that four of them set off with an intention to come here but that they killed one & the rest returned.
>
> James Bird to John McNab, 23 December 1806[2]

The Blackfoot were at the centre of the dramatic changes that made 1806 a turning point in the history of the northwestern plains. In the Saskatchewan basin the longstanding but fragile northern coalition dissolved. While acrimonious incidents had punctuated the general amity among the Blackfoot, Cree, and Assiniboine bands before 1806, and various bands managed to maintain peace for several more years after 1806, the normal state of affairs from 1806 to 1870 would be a Cree and Assiniboine coalition against the Blackfoot, Atsina, and Sarcee bands.[3] The realignment that began in 1806 affected everyone on the northwestern plains. Perhaps in the very month that the northern coalition disintegrated, the Peigan encountered a small party of Euroamericans in the upper Missouri River basin. The Peigan learned the unsettling news that the Euroamerican newcomers had already made peace with their enemies, the Shoshoni and

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[1] HBCA B.60/a/6, fo. 7-7d.

[2] HBCA B.60/a/6, fo. 6.

[3] See Binnema, "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands."

Flathead. In the next year the flow of European goods to the southern coalition from both the Saskatchewan River and the Missouri River increased substantially exactly as Lewis and Clark predicted it would. The dramatic change in the balance of military power on the northwestern plains promised to affect every inhabitant of the northwestern plains. Indeed, the shifting alignments and power balances even promised to change the environment of the plains.

The northern coalition disintegrated during the summer of 1806 when a large combined party of about four hundred Siksika, with some Blood, and about four hundred Cree and Assiniboine "were on their way to wage war on the Rapid Indians, their common enemy," but along the way a battle broke out between the two groups, apparently arising over a dispute over the ownership of a horse.[4] The altercation left twenty eight of the Siksika and three of the Cree dead and forced the Cree "to a precipitate retreat with a loss of part of their Horses & baggage and dispersing in all quarters to conceal themselves in the woods leaving their Enemies masters of the Plains from South Branch to Acton House."[5] The Siksika meanwhile, threatened "indiscriminate vengeance."[6] Their opportunity came in September when a group of two or three hundred Siksika met a small band of about twenty-five Cree who were returning from a visit with the Peigan, unaware of the events of the summer. The Siksika attacked the Cree about a hundred miles from Edmonton, killing or enslaving all but two men.[7] The warfare of the summer of 1806 foreshadowed the continual warfare that marked the relationship between a new central coalition (composed of Blackfoot, Atsina, and Sarcee bands) and a northern coalition (composed of Plains Cree and Plains Assiniboine bands).[8]

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[4] Lamb, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 100.

[5] HBCA B.60/a/6, James Bird to John McNab, 23 December 1806 (fo. 5).

[6] HBCA B.60/a/6, 25 August 1806.

The years surrounding 1806 were a turning point in the Missouri and Columbia River basins as well. Crow and Shoshoni bands had hosted Canadian traders on the northwestern plains before 1806 but the Canadians could never make effective use of the Missouri River. At the beginning of 1805, the southern bands could not have expected the situation to change. By the end of 1806, without exception, the bands of the southern coalition anticipated direct trading relations with Euroamerican traders or trappers. In 1805 and 1806 Shoshoni and Flathead bands met members of the Lewis and Clark expedition, envoys from the United States, who promised that traders would soon arrive to supply them with the weapons they desired. The Crow did not meet these envoys, but established some contact with United States fur traders in 1807. Also in 1807 NWC traders established direct trading relations with the Kutenai.[9] Within a few years, the Euroamerican presence spread along the borders of the northwestern plains, and the southern bands found their access to Euroamerican goods became far more reliable. The history of the northwestern plains had entered a new era.

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[7] HBCA B.60/a/6, 22 September 1806; HBCA B.60/a/6, James Bird to John McNab, 23 December 1806 (fo. 5).

[8] In *The Plains Cree,* Milloy has summarized Cree-Blackfoot relations from the 1790s to 1870. For his explanation of 1806 as a turning point see his Chapter 3.

[9] Hopwood, *David Thompson Travels*, 243.

Conclusion

The history of the northwestern plains is ancient, dynamic, complex, and fascinating. For centuries it was the common and contested ground of various human societies. During the bison era the plentiful bison herds of the region repeatedly drew communities from adjacent but less abundant environments. Developing sophisticated subsistence strategies and complex seasonal rounds, these diverse communities frequently met each other in peace and in warfare. Despite some enormous cultural differences among them, some developed longstanding symbiotic relationships. Occasionally, culturally dissimilar communities mingled, merged, fused, and even formed new "mixed" identities. Elsewhere members of a single culture could take different paths. They sometimes fractured, divided, diverged and even developed new ethnicities. Members of each band on the northwestern plains sought their own security in constantly changing circumstances. The arrival of the bow and arrow, of the horse and gun, of Old World diseases, and Euroamerican traders, were among the important milestones in the history of the northwestern plains between A.D. 200 and 1806, but the advent of the horse and gun was probably the most dramatic turning point in this entire period. The arrival of the horse and gun between 1730 and 1770, and the chronically uneven distribution of horses thereafter, encouraged the development and entrenchment of two interethnic coalitions of bands. The southern coalition, consisting of Crow, Shoshoni, Flathead and Kutenai bands, was wealthy in horses but poor in guns, while the northern coalition of Blackfoot, Atsina, Sarcee, and Cree bands had fewer horses but many guns. Between 1740 and 1750, as the distribution of guns and horses changed, the northern coalition rapidly moved from the defensive to the offensive.

When Euroamerican traders arrived they became influential, but not powerful, participants in events in the region. They, like previous newcomers, found a place on the northwestern plains by forging partnerships with prior inhabitants. Euroamericans were no more united or monolithic than the Native bands on the northern plains. They, like other residents of the plains, competed among themselves for the resources of the region even as they established symbiotic relationships with the northern coalition of bands. The Euroamericans aspired to a position of neutrality from which they could broker peace agreements among Native groups. Their own self-interests determined this approach. For Euroamericans, however, neutrality was an impossible dream. In practice, fur traders were members of the northern coalition. They traded exclusively with these bands, and developed particularly close relations with some of them. And when forces unleashed by the presence of Euroamericans fractured the northern coalition, traders inevitably became embroiled in the conflicts that ensued. The traders' response to the attacks of their own partners reveals how completely they had become integrated into the network and practices of trade, warfare, and diplomacy on the northwestern plains. Fur traders' efforts to restore relations with their trading partners conformed to the established conventions on the northwestern plains; they could not rely on their imported Euroamerican customs or standards of law, justice, or diplomacy. Given their limited power, Euroamericans enjoyed scant ability to direct the behaviour of their partners. The fur traders' arrival and continued residence on the northwestern plains undermined the very alignment of bands from which the traders profited, and all the diplomatic efforts of the Euroamericans failed to prevent the coalition's gradual dissolution. Similarly the traders could not stop their partners from waging unrelenting warfare upon their rivals.

The history of the northwestern plains is almost certainly not unique. If we assume that band level or tribal societies were "primitive" or "simple," we will inevitably overlook the inherent complexity of all societies. Our understanding of the histories of these societies will suffer. If we reduce the relationship between representatives of Western societies and indigenous societies to their cultural dimensions, we cannot hope to reconstruct the past adequately. Much of the scholarship of the twentieth century addresses the degree of cultural change and continuity in the history of indigenous societies. Much of the debate surrounds the cultural consequences of Euroamerican-newcomer contacts. These debates are not irrelevant, but neither do they encourage the development of a contextualist literature. If the Natives of the northwestern plains experienced cultural crises upon on the arrival of Euroamericans the evidence for them is scant. The arrival of Euroamerican goods and Euroamericans themselves are vital to an understanding of aspects of this history whether or not these arrivals brought dramatic cultural change. By moving beyond the limits of culturalist scholarship, researchers can ensure that the historiography of indigenous societies can remain the vital and innovative field it has been since the 1970s.

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Appendix I

Seasonal Bison Movements on the Northern Plains, 1775-1800

Given the doubt cast on the seasonal migration thesis in the past decade, it is necessary to defend the idea that bison concentrations varied according to a regular and predictable pattern. Those who have challenged the seasonal migration thesis directly, rightly argue that the plains bison is first and foremost a creature of the plains. When weather conditions allowed, the bison clearly tended to gravitate toward the open grasslands. This, however, is an argument that, though not emphasized, was never denied by the proponents of the seasonal migration thesis.[1] It is also worth noting that bison could commonly be found in the parkland during the summer. Indeed, the documentary evidence makes it clear that bison could be found in all grassland regions in all seasons. The argument, however, that fur trade documents do not support the theory that bison concentrations varied according to regular and predictable seasonal patterns however, is mistaken. It was an oft-repeated axiom among fur traders that cold weather brought the bison into the shelter of the parklands and valleys. It would be impossible to make a complete list of the references to these migrations. Moodie and Ray presented many examples.[2] Those familiar with the relevant primary documents could provide many more. For example, upon reaching Nipawi, the border between forest and parkland along the Saskatchewan River in 1808, Alexander Henry the Younger noted that "the Buffalo are here in abundance in the Winter season, when the cold weather obliges them to leave the open plains, and seek shelter among the Hammocks of Wood, where they find plenty of good long Grass."[3]

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[1] See Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns," 154.

[2] See Moodie and Ray, "Buffalo Migrations," 48-51.

[3] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 350.

It is clear therefore, that the traders, explorers, and missionaries (indeed, the Natives) shared the belief that bison migrated. Was this merely a mistaken perception? A survey of several winters between 1775 and 1800 shows that, consistent with the Moodie and Ray arguments, bison did resort to the parkland during cold weather but tended to remain on the grasslands during warm and relatively snow free winters.[4] In the exceptionally cold winter of 1775-6 Alexander Henry the Elder witnessed bison crowd into the wooded country near the Saskatchewan River during severe weather.[5] In 1783, William Tomison, an experienced HBC servant stationed at Hudson House (nearly at Nipawi) noted that the uncommonly mild early winter had left the bison herds three to five days from the post, "more than was ever done here before."[6] In contrast, the winter of 1788-9 set in early and was long and exceptionally snowy. The bison were never far from Manchester House.[7] The following year the weather remained warm and snowless well into November, and traders at South Branch House reported difficulty procuring bison. Then by late December the weather had turned and the snow was exceptionally deep and Mitchell Oman noted that the buffalo had moved closer to the post. Then, as spring came, he noted that "The Buffalo is now dayly receeding from us"[8] During the winter of 1790-91 traders noted that the winter was exceptionally mild. They also noted that provisions were difficult to procure. William Tomison at Manchester House, for example, wrote that "We have had one of the mildest Winters I ever knew in this Country, and one of the worst for Provisions I have known for some time"[9] In 1796 Peter Fidler, an intelligent and observant trader wrote from Buckingham House that "we ... hope the Buffalo will soon be nearer by than before by reason of the severe weather, that has of late prevailed."[10] Only days later George Sutherland at Edmonton noted that "Since the cold weather commenced the buffalo have been plenty near us and hope by this day to have laid in our winter stock."[11] In 1799-1800 unusually warm weather left the entire northern plains almost snowless in February, leading the bison to be far from the fur trade posts. According to Alexander Henry the Younger, "hunger was the general cry at all our Establishments on the Assiniboine River."[12] At Edmonton James Bird also noted the warmness of the winter and scarcity of provisions.[13] It is clear then, that during the winter, bison tended to be more concentrated in the parkland than at other times of the year, although warm snowless winters encouraged them to remain dispersed on the open plains. The documentary evidence from the period between 1775 and 1800 then, supports the theory that the concentration of bison on the northwestern plains varied according to the seasons during most winters, and was predictable under anomalous conditions.[14]

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[4] The winters between 1775 and 1800 were chosen because they are the earliest years for which there is sufficient documentary evidence. Given the greater Euroamerican presence in later years, and the increased Cree-Blackfoot hostilities after 1800 bison movements are much more likely to have been affected by human actions in later years. (There is reason to believe that Blackfoot bands deliberately burned vast tracts of parklands after 1806 in order to prevent bison from resorting to the parklands.)

[5] Bain, ed., *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, 286.

[6] HBCA B.87/a/6, William Tomison (Hudson House) to George Hudson, (Cumberland House), 9 February 1783.

[7] HBCA B.121/a/3, *passim*, but see especially 5 January 1789.

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[8] HBCA B.205/a/4, 9 December 1789, 22 January 1790, 1 April 1790. Also see B.121/a/4, Mitchell Oman to William Walker, 28 December 1789.

[9] HBCA B.205/a/5 *passim*, but especially 4 March 1791. Quote is from HBCA B.121/a/6, William Tomison to Philip Turnor, 25 February 1791.

[10] HBCA B.24/a/4, Peter Fidler to George Sutherland, 20 December 1796.

[11] George Sutherland (Edmonton House) to James Bird (Carlton House), 3 January 1797 in Alice M. Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence: 1795-1802* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), 81.

[12] Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 3.

[13] Alice Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 241.

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[14] The reader should not lose sight of the fact that factors other than weather could influence the concentrations of bison. See Moodie and Ray's discussion, "Buffalo Migrations," 50-51.

Appendix II
Dramatis Personae

The terms used in this study to refer to Native ethnic groups are typically those that appear commonly in primary documents and are commonly understood among English-speakers today except where these terms are ambiguous. Although neither the usage employed in this study, nor any other, is fully satisfying, there are several reasons for using this approach. First, such a usage makes the study more accessible to many potential readers. Most Natives today will employ a prevalent exonym when they identify themselves in English, in much the same way as those who consider themselves *français* will identify themselves as "French" when speaking in English. In many cases, this exonym is similar to the exonym used in historical documents two hundred years ago. By using an exonym in this case, the study is made accessible to many readers who might be disoriented by the juxtaposition of familiar exonyms in quotes, with unfamiliar ethonyms that refer to the same people. It is certain that ethonyms change over time. We cannot know for certain that the all of the Native groups during the period under study used the same ethonym as their descendants do today. Finally, not all Native groups are united on the question of how outsiders should refer to them.

I decided upon the term to use for each Native groups after considering the issue carefully. Certainly the usage is not entirely satisfactory. The exonyms are generally corruptions of terms used by neighbours. For instance, Siouan and Algonkian bands referred to the Absaroke by using terms that traders translated as "Crow" or "Gens du Corbeau." In a pattern familiar throughout North America, Euroamericans adopted the term rather than the ethonym. Certainly some readers will consider my decision to adhere to these terms as misguided. I hope they will not interpret them as evidence of disrespect. In the interest of clarity, I have listed some of the names by which Native groups identified in historical documents or recent literature. I have also listed exonyms that commonly appear in the primary documents. Finally, in some cases I have provided fuller discussions of the implications of my usage.

Arapaho
    Inunaina (ethonym)
    Arapaho
    Gens des Vaches and its translation Buffalo Indians.
    Tatood Indians
    variations on Kanenavich and Caveninavish
Assiniboine
    Nakoda (ethonym)
    variations on Assiniboine, Assinae Poets, Usinnepwat, Assinipualak, Sinepoets
    Poets
    variations on Stoney or Stone
Atsina (Reasons for this usage are explained below)
    A'ani (ethonym)
        Gros Ventre and variations on its translation, Big Bellies, Paunch Indians
    Gros Ventre of the Prairie
    variations on Minatarees of the Prairies
    Fall, Waterfall, or Rapid(s) Indians
Blackfoot (used to refer to the Peigan, Blood, and Siksika collectively)
    Nitsitapi (ethonym)
    Blackfoot Confederacy
    Gens du large, Plain Indians
    Archithinue, Slave Indians.
    Blackfeet
    Peeagan tribes
Blood
    variations on Kainai, Kainah (ethonym)
    Blood or Bloody
    Kennekoon
Cree
    Nahiawak (ethonym)
    variations of Cree, Kree, Kinistinaux, Kilistino
    variations of Nehathawa, Nahathaways, Ne-heth-aw-a
    variations of Southern, Southerd, Southd

- Crow
  - variations on Absaroke, Absaroka, Apsarechas, Apsaruke, Ererokas (ethonym)
  - Crow, Crow Mountain, and its translation Gens du Corbeau
  - Rocky Mountain Indians

- Flathead
  - variations on Flathead, Flatt head and Tetes Platte
  - variations on Saleesh, Celish
  - Tushapah
- Hidatsa
  - variations on Big Bellies, Paunch Indians, Gros Ventre
  - variations on Gros Ventre of the Missouri
  - variations on Mintari, Minatarees, Minetarees
  - variations on Wahtee, Ouachipouennes, Naywatame Poets
  - Vault Indians
  - Willow Indians
  - Fall or Flying Fall Indians
- Kutenai
  - Tunaxa (ethonym)
  - variations on Coutonées, Cuttencha, Coutenais, Cottonna haw, Kootenay, Kootenai
- Peigan
  - variations on Peeagan, Pikuni, Piegan, Pekanow, Picanau, Pee,ken,now, Peeaganakoon, Pikani (ethonym)
  - Muddy River Indians or Muddies and occasionally Missouri River Indians
  - Blackfoot
- Sarcee
  - Sotina, T'suu Tina (ethonym)
  - variations on Sarcee, Sarsi, Circee, Sussu Sussew
- Sikiska (this usage is explained below)
  - Siksika (ethonym)
  - Blackfoot
  - Saxeekoon
- Shoshoni (This usage is explained below)
  - variations on Shoshone, Sho Shone, Cho shones
  - Snake
  - variations on Alitans
  - variations on Kanasick thinewock

Atsina

The term *Atsina* is used in this study in preference to the term *Gros Ventre*, because the latter term has been the source of tremendous confusion during the fur trade era and afterwards. The Atsina were an Algonkian hunting and gathering society that resided near the lower South Saskatchewan River in the 1770s but withdrew upriver towards the Cypress Hills by 1806. They were kin of the Arapaho, who had forged a close association with Cheyenne in the west central plains. Many of their descendants now live with some Assiniboine on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana. The term Gros Ventre is common in the documentary record and is still commonly applied today, but it is problematic because of its ambiguity. Fur trade documents frequently refer to both these people and the Hidatsa as "Fall" or "Gros Ventre" reflecting the assumption, common among fur traders, that the two groups were related. Two fur traders, David Thompson and Alexander Henry the Younger, either created or supported this belief during the fur trade era, and their journals have fueled the debate into the present day. Thompson and Henry clearly believed that the Fall Indians of the Saskatchewan River were kin of the Hidatsa.[1] Some scholars, particularly archaeologists, insist the same thing. Archaeologist Boyd Wettlaufer has insisted that all references to the Gros Ventre, Fall, or Rapids Indians in the documentary record refer to the Hidatsa.[2] William J. Byrne has argued that many of these references, particularly in the early period, are to the Hidatsa.[3] After a close examination of the documents, Dale Russell was not as categorical. Still, he suggests that most of the Fall Indians on the northern plains were Hidatsa, and that the Atsina probably never did inhabit the region between the rivers.[4]

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[1] Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, 235-6, 327; Gough, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger*, 381-2.

[2] Boyd Wettlaufer and William J. Mayer-Oakes, *The Long Creek Site* (Regina: Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History Anthropological Series No. 2, 1960), 106-7.

Russell is correct in noting that Thompson and Henry, both of whom had visited the Hidatsa villages and traded with "Gros Ventre of the Prairie, were keen observers." Their opinions ought not to be taken lightly. Archaeologists are also correct that there is archaeological and documentary evidence of a Hidatsa presence on the northern plains. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to show that Thompson and Henry were mistaken about any kinship between a substantial population of "Fall Indian" hunters on the South Saskatchewan in the early equestrian era and the Hidatsa of the Missouri.

Peter Fidler's documents related to the attack of "Fall Indians" on Chesterfield House during the 1801-02 season are important in an identification of these Natives. Fidler collected a "Fall Indian" word list that linguist David Pentland has identified as Atsina.[5] Fidler's information that these "Fall" were related to the Arapaho confirms them as Atsina. Fidler also recorded information that ties these Atsina to the earlier attacks at

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[3] Byrne, *The Archaeology and Prehistory of Southern Alberta*, 548-52; and Byrne, "An Archaeological Demonstration of Migration, 269-70.

[4] Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 200-212; Dale Russell, "Native Groups in the Saskatoon Area in the 1700s and 1800s," Urve Linnamae and Tim E.H. Jones, eds., *Out of the Past: Sites, Digs and Artifacts in the Saskatchewan Area* (Saskatoon: Saskatoon Archaeological Society, 1988), 143-6.

[5] David Pentland, personal communication, 15 December 1994. The word list can be found in HBCA B.34/a.1. fos. 15d-20d.

South Branch House. Fidler wrote that the Atsina attack at Chesterfield House was launched by A kas kin, brother of a prominent Fall Indian killed during a "Fall Indian" attack on South Branch House in 1794. Clearly then, there can be little doubt but that the attacks of 1793 and 1794 were also mounted by Atsina, not Hidatsa. This very specific evidence then, proves the oft cited passage in Henry's journal to be incorrect. The passages in Thompson's narrative are simply confused. Thompson never explicitly linked the Hidatsa with the attack of 1794, although he did imply it. It is clear that parts of Thompson's description of the "Fall Indians" at the Missouri (the Hidatsa) was true of the Atsina but not of the Hidatsa. Thompson, for example was aware of some Fall that were friends of the Cheyenne (true of some Atsina/Arapaho bands) and some that were associated with the Peigan (true of the Atsina).[6]

The incontestable connection between the Atsina and the attacks on fur trade posts in 1793 and 1794 fits well with Edward Umfreville's description of the Native inhabitants of the region a decade earlier. Based on his experiences from the 1780s, Umfreville described the Fall as living near the Eagle Hills. His word list of the Fall language, is certainly Atsina.[7] This chain of evidence establishes that the Fall Indians (Gros Ventre of the Prairie) that resided near the forks of the Saskatchewan River in the 1770s were Atsina. It is important to note, however, that there was a Hidatsa presence on the northern plains in both the pedestrian and equestrian eras.

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[6] Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 235-6.

[7] David Pentland, "In Defence of Edward Umfreville," William Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Seventh Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carlton University, 1976), 63-104.

How do we account for the confusion of the fur traders like Thompson and Henry? Before 1780, fur traders were already aware that the Atsina had kin towards the south. Edward Umfreville came to believe, probably based on information given him by Cree or Assiniboine bands, that the "Fall Indians" were "a tribe that has detached itself from some distant nation with which we are not yet acquainted."[8] Evidently, then, the knowledge that the Atsina had southern kin had made its way into the fur traders' collective knowledge before Henry and Thompson arrived. Perhaps the erroneous conclusion that these southern kin were the Hidatsa had already become part of the fur traders' oral traditions by the time Thompson and Henry arrived. If not, it is likely that Thompson and Henry were the authors of this tradition.

Only a few fur traders ever visited both the Hidatsa and the Atsina, and it is almost certain that not a single trader ever learned both languages. Certainly Thompson and Henry did not. Both Thompson and Henry had only brief contact with the Hidatsa. A number of years separated their visits to the Hidatsa villages and their first contact with the Atsina.[9] Intelligent as they were, under the circumstances they were unable to make a reliable comparison between the two languages. Both men probably knew that the Hidatsa had a presence on the northern plains, and both certainly understood that the Atsina had kin and close associations with groups to the southward. Given that fur traders commonly referred to both the Atsina and Hidatsa as "Gros Ventre" and as "Fall," it would have been easy for Thompson and Henry to arrive at their mistaken conclusion. Whether Thompson and Henry arrived at the conclusion themselves or assimilated it from fur trader's collective knowledge, it was mistaken.[10]

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[8] Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson Bay*, ** 9197-8?.

[9] Complicating the picture is the fact that Mary Malainey has found evidence that some Atsina did settle in the Middle Missouri Villages. See Mary E. Mailaney "The Gros Ventre/Fall Indians in Historical and Archaeological Interpretation," unpublished paper in the author's possession.

Kutenai

The Kutenai were a nomadic hunting and gathering society. It is almost certain that until 1780, some Kutenai bands resided permanently east of the Rocky Mountains, although other bands resided in the Rocky Mountain Trench. After 1780, the Kutenai presence on the northwestern plains was limited to seasonal bison hunts. Evidence regarding the Kutenai before the 1780s, however, is shrouded in mystery. It is possible that the Kutenai are linked to the Avonlea peoples who apparently originally brought bow and arrow technology to the Great Plains. On the other hand, the Kutenai may be relatively recent migrants to the northwestern plains. Of far greater interest, given the theme of the present study, is the bedeviling mystery of the Kutenai language and its relationship to other languages, for the Kutenai may hold the key to an understanding of aspects of human interaction on the northwestern plains.

For many years scholars of both the Blackfoot and the Kutenai have been struck by the possibility that Kutenai society had diverse roots. Already in 1885 Horatio Hale marveled at how the obviously Algonkian grammar of the Blackfoot language was accompanied by a distinctly non-Algonkian vocabulary. This knowledge, combined with his knowledge of traditions among the Kutenai that they are related to the Peigan, and contrasting traditions among the Blackfoot that they came from the southwest or the east led him to suggest that "it would be very desirable to trace that portion of the Blackfoot vocabulary which is not of Algonkin origin to its source in the language of some other language stock. ... and particularly with those tribes west of the Rocky Mountains."[11] More than a century later, linguists have been unable conclusively to trace the source of non-Algonkian aspects of the Blackfoot language. Neither have they been able to demonstrate conclusively the roots of the Kutenai language. They have, however, found that the Kutenai language bears certain similarities to the Blackfoot language. These similarities suggest that the ancestors of the modern Blackfoot and Kutenai experienced longstanding and peaceful contact.

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[10] The only good survey of Atsina history during the fur trade era is Loretta Fowler's brief summary contained in her anthropological study of this fascinating community. See Loretta Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778-1984* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1987), 21-47. For a discussion of the debate surrounding the identity of the "Gros Ventre see Brink, *Dog Days in Alberta*, 34-41.

Confirmation that Kutenai and Blackfoot are similar has allowed us to posit a significant history of interaction, but linguists have not demonstrated a genetic link between the languages. Linguists have explored many possibilities, but most have studied the relationship between Kutenai and the Algonkian languages.[12] They perhaps followed the suggestion of Horatio Hale. Perhaps they followed the lead of the prominent linguist of the early twentieth century, Edward Sapir. Ethnographer Turney-High noted in 1941 that after denying any affiliation between Kutenai and Algonkian languages for many years, Sapir had categorized Kutenai as an Algonkian language in 1929.[13] In fact, Sapir had classified, Kutenai with the "Agonkin-Wakashan" languages which he subdivided into "Algonkin-Ritwan," "Kootenay," and "Mosan (Wakashan-Salish)" languages.[14] Thus Sapir was not implying a closer relationship between Kutenai and Algonkian languages, than between Kutenai and the Salish languages. Even today linguists have not shown a genetic tie between Kutenai and the Algonkian languages.[15]

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[11] Hale, "Report on the Blackfoot Tribes," 704.

[12] J.C. Yerbury, "Kootenay Linguistics: An Unsolved Mystery," *Idaho Yesterdays* 22 (1)(Spring 1978): 11-15. Yerbury explains that some have even explored the relationship between Kutenai and Malay-Polynesian languages and with Welsh! Curiously Alexander Chamberlain searched for possible similarities between Kutenai and Blackfoot and between Kutenai and Shoshonean and Siouan languages (concluding that Kutenai was not related to these languages, but without exploring any other possible relationships, he concluded that Kutenai was a unique language. Chamberlain, "Report

An ability to confirm a genetic link between Kutenai and another language would enable us to understand better the history of the Kutenai. Linguists have been much more likely to explore possible connections between Kutenai and Algonkian than connections between Kutenai and the Salish languages, probably because efforts at reconstructing proto-Salish have lagged behind similar efforts to reconstruct proto-Algonkian. Still, in 1941 Turney-High proposed that linguists should turn their attention towards a potential

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on the Kootenay Indians," 589; Alexander F. Chamberlain, "Some Kutenai Linguistic Material," *American Anthropologist* 11 (1909): 13-26.

[13] Turney-High, "Ethnography of the Kutenai," 10.

[14] Edward Sapir, "Central and North American Languages" as reprinted in David G. Mandelbaum, ed., *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture, and Personality* (Berkley, University of California Press, 1951), 172.

[15] Haas, "Is Kutenai Related to Algonkian?"

connection between Kutenai and the Salishan languages.[16] In 1965, after making some preliminary studies Mary Haas described possible affiliations as "not without interest."[17] In a more thorough study, Lawrence Morgan argued that the similarities in some of the basic aspects of the Kutenai and the Salishan languages can only be explained by assuming a common origin in a proto-Salishan language.[18] Others have come to a similar conclusion.[19] More study is needed, but this linguistic evidence, opens the possibility that the Kutenai have roots in plains Algonkian and in Salishan communities.

Research in linguistics offers the greatest promise in scholarly attempts to understand Kutenai history. Given the research already completed, future work should focus on the intriguing possibility that remarkable similarities between Kutenai and Blackfoot are the result of borrowing, but that the Kutenai language is genetically related to proto-Salishan. Such research would have implications for our understanding of Kutenai history, but could have tremendous implications beyond this narrow question. New research could inform discussions around such diverse questions as the nature of Native ethnicity and the relationship between culture and the environment.

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[16] Turney-High, "Ethnography of the Kutenai," 10.

[17] Mary R. Haas, "Is Kutenai Related to Algonkian?" *Canadian Journal of Linguistics*, 10 (1965): 86.

[18] Lawrence R. Morgan, "Kootenay-Salishan Linguistic Comparison: A Preliminary Study," M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1980. Morgan proposes that Kutenai still be considered an isolate, but an isolate within the Salishan-Kutenai language stock.

[19] Foster, "Language and the Culture History of North America," 81.

Shoshoni

While it is safe to say that Shoshoni were a Numic speaking hunting and gathering society, virtually everything else about the role of the Shoshoni in the history of the northwestern plains is now a subject of debate. This study argues that Shoshoni bands entered the margins of the northwestern plains around 1500 and that they became the dominant military force in the region soon after the arrival of the horse around 1700. Yet their preeminence was short lived. By the turn of the nineteenth century their enemies had all but eliminated their access to the northwestern plains. This argument is based on the interpretation that the "Snake Indians" mentioned in the relevant historical documents are Shoshoni bands. Since not all scholars accept this argument, it must be discussed in some detail.

While scholars agree that the Shoshoni have resided on the northwestern plains, they do not agree on how significant this presence has been. Recent studies clearly demonstrate that none of the rock art found on the northwestern plains can be linked conclusively to the Shoshoni.[20] These findings have bolstered the argument of some archaeologists who insist that the Shoshoni exerted only a minor impact on the history of

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[20] P. S. Barry, *Mystical Themes in Milk River Rock Art* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1991), and Martin Magne and M. Klassen, "A Multivariate Study of Rock Art Anthropomorphs at Writing-On-Stone, Southern Alberta," *American Antiquity* 56 (1991): 389-418. Mary Lou Larson and Marcel Kornfeld, "Betwixt and between the Basin and the Plains: The Limits of Numic Expansion," in Madsen and Rhode, *Across the West*, 205. On the other hand, similarities in Nevada and Montana rock art do suggest that some of the rock art on the Montana high plains may be connected to the Numic peoples, Conner and Conner, *Rock Art of the Montana High Plains*, 37.

the northwestern plains.[21] Verifiable archaeological evidence for a Shoshoni presence on the northwestern plains is restricted to a small segment of the upper Missouri River basin at best. Yet, this is not surprising. Even if the Shoshoni once dominated the region as far north as the Bow River or beyond, the period during which they did so was, archaeologically speaking, fleeting. It lasted no more than fifty years of the early equestrian era. This would not have been long enough for the Shoshoni population to expand much. It is likely that, rather than relying upon the resources of the Saskatchewan basin themselves, the Shoshoni used their military advantages to render much of the region too dangerous for Blackfoot hunters to exploit. Evidently, affiliations between the Shoshoni and proto-Crow and Crow allowed bands of the Siouan speakers to settle briefly as far north as the Bow River region. The migrants from the Middle Missouri Villages left the One Gun phase sites we know today. The unique semi-sedentary sites they established are far more identifiable than any artifacts the nomadic Shoshoni would have left. Thus, the uncovered evidence of the One Gun phase likely exaggerates the presence of the Middle Missouri Villagers on the northwestern plains. On the other hand, the dearth of uncovered archaeological artifacts identifiable as Shoshoni should not be construed as evidence that the Shoshoni were absent in the region. The Shoshoni were not be the only nomadic bison hunting society on the northwestern plains for which there is scant verifiable archaeological evidence.

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[21] See Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 29-30. In 1908 Lawrence Burpee argued that the "Snake" of Matthew Cocking's journal were Sioux, because he doubted that the Shoshoni exerted any influence in the Saskatchewan basin in the 1770s, Burpee, "An Adventurer from Hudson Bay," 103. Today, however, there is a virtual consensus among historians that the Snake are the Shoshoni.

Much of the recent debate centres around the issue of the ethnicity of people identified in the early historical documents as the "Snake." Those who argue that the Shoshoni were not major players in the history of the northwestern plains also dispute the long-held belief that the "Snake" are the Shoshoni. They contend that the Snake are the ethnographic expression of the One Gun phase, which, almost everyone agrees, represents Siouan speakers (probably the Hidatsa or Crow) from the Middle Missouri Villages. Given that we know that many Native groups have referred to the Siouan speakers as "Snakes," the conclusion that the Snakes, at least in early documents, were Siouan peoples seems to a number of scholars to be "inescapable."[22] On the contrary, a close examination of the documents suggests that the older interpretation that the Snake are the Shoshoni is very well supported.

In 1800 Peter Fidler collected word lists in three languages unfamiliar to him: "Fall Indian," "Crow Mountain Indian," and "Snake Indian."[23] His informant was almost certainly Blackfoot. Evidently then, by 1800 the Blackfoot used the term "Snake" to refer to people who spoke a certain language and that these were not the Crow. Two experts in the Numic languages have confirmed that Fidler's list is Shoshoni. Demitri B. Shimkin described the vocabulary as that of a Northern Shoshoni dialect that betrays these "Snake" as ancestral to the present-day Wind River Shoshoni of Wyoming.[24] Linguist Wick

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[22] Vickers in Schlesier, *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500*, 29.

[23] The Shoshoni word list is contained in HBCA, B.34/a.1., fo. 21a. Others are on fos. 15d-22.

[24] Shimkin "Comanche-Shoshone Words of Acculturation," 209.

Miller agreed. He found that the Snake word, *teheyah* "horse," indicates that the list is of a northern Shoshoni dialect.[25] It is almost certain then, that when the Blackfoot referred to the "Snake" in 1800, they were referring to Shoshoni bands specifically.

Some may still argue that earlier references to the Snake, references that describe the military dominance of the Snake in the early equestrian and even the late pedestrian era, are to enemies more generically, or to Siouan speakers. This argument is based solely on the lack of archaeological evidence of a Shoshoni presence on the northwestern plains, and the evidence of Siouans there at the same time, for the documentary evidence does not support it. If anything, it undermines it significantly. In 1782, five years before David Thompson met Young Man, and decades before David Thompson penned his *Narratives*, Matthew Cocking wrote that the "Kanasick thinewock (i.e.) Snake Indians" were said to trade with the Spanish.[26] This description applied to Numic speakers at the time, but not to Siouans.

Although no archaeological evidence substantiates it, documentary evidence (discussed in the chapters of this study) makes it clear that in the early nineteenth century, Shoshoni bands raided the Blackfoot even north of the Cypress Hills. By that time the militarily weak Shoshoni bands suffered constant harassment even southwest of the continental divide.[27] If we know that the Shoshoni were launching raids that far north in the early nineteenth century, it becomes difficult *not* to believe that they were a potent force throughout the region seventy years earlier when they enjoyed enormous military advantages over their northern neighbours.

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[25] Wick Miller, personal communication, 25 March 1993.

[26] HBCA B.239/a/79 fo. 73d.

[27] Indeed, in 1792 Peter Fidler understood that "the Snake Indians used to inhabit about this [Eagle] Hill, but since the Europeans have penetrated into these parts & supplied the surrounding nations with firearms, those Indians have gradually receded

It is difficult to defend a theory that a Blackfoot term that clearly referred to the Shoshoni in 1800, referred to a completely different group less than twenty years earlier when Peigan informant, Young Man (Saukamappee) told David Thompson of the formerly fearsome Snakes. The fact that, not just the Blackfoot, but many Native groups including Siouan speakers, referred to Shoshoni as the "Snake," indicates how widespread this usage was.[28] The preponderance of the evidence therefore, suggests that the Blackfoot appellation *Snakes*, and similar terms among many other Native groups, have long referred to Numic speakers on the northwestern plains.[29]

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back to the Swards, & at this time there is not a tent of this nation to be found within 500 miles," Peter Fidler, E.3/1, 30 September 1792, as quoted in Johnson, *Saskatchewan Journals*, 274n.

[28] Demitri B. Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone" in Warren L. D'Azevedo, ed. *Handbook of North American Indians* vol. 11 *Great Basin* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution 1986), 308-34; Brink, *Dog Days in Southern Alberta*, 46. James Teit's studies make it clear that the Flathead referred to the Shoshoni as the "Mountain Snake"; Teit, "The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateau," 301.

[29] See Brink, *Dog Days in Southern Alberta*, 41-9 for another discussion of the debate surrounding the identity of the Snake.

Appendix III
Blackfoot and Atsina Maps, 1801

In 1801 and 1802 Hudson's Bay Company trader, Peter Fidler, collected several Native maps drawn by Blackfoot and Atsina informants. Evidence extracted from some of them have contributed to interpretations contained in this study. The maps become useful historical sources, however, only when we understand the Native cartographic conventions upon which they are based. These conventions, and "translations" of these maps using Western cartographic conventions are explained in an unpublished paper by the present author.[1] The translations of the names of Native groups in each of the maps is based upon earlier studies.[2]

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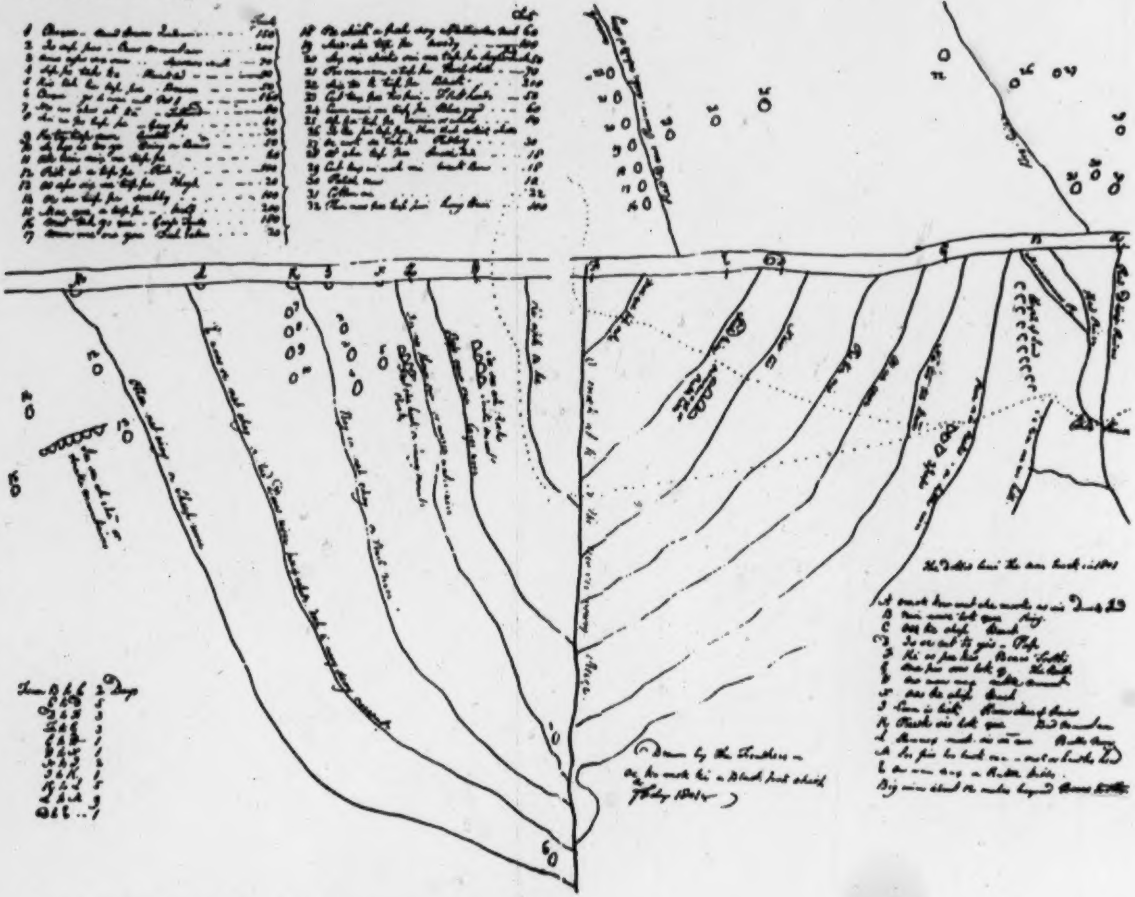
[1] Binnema, "Indian Maps as Ethnohistorical Sources," Unpublished paper presented at the Thirtieth Northern Great Plains History Conference, 27-30 September 1995, Brandon, Manitoba.

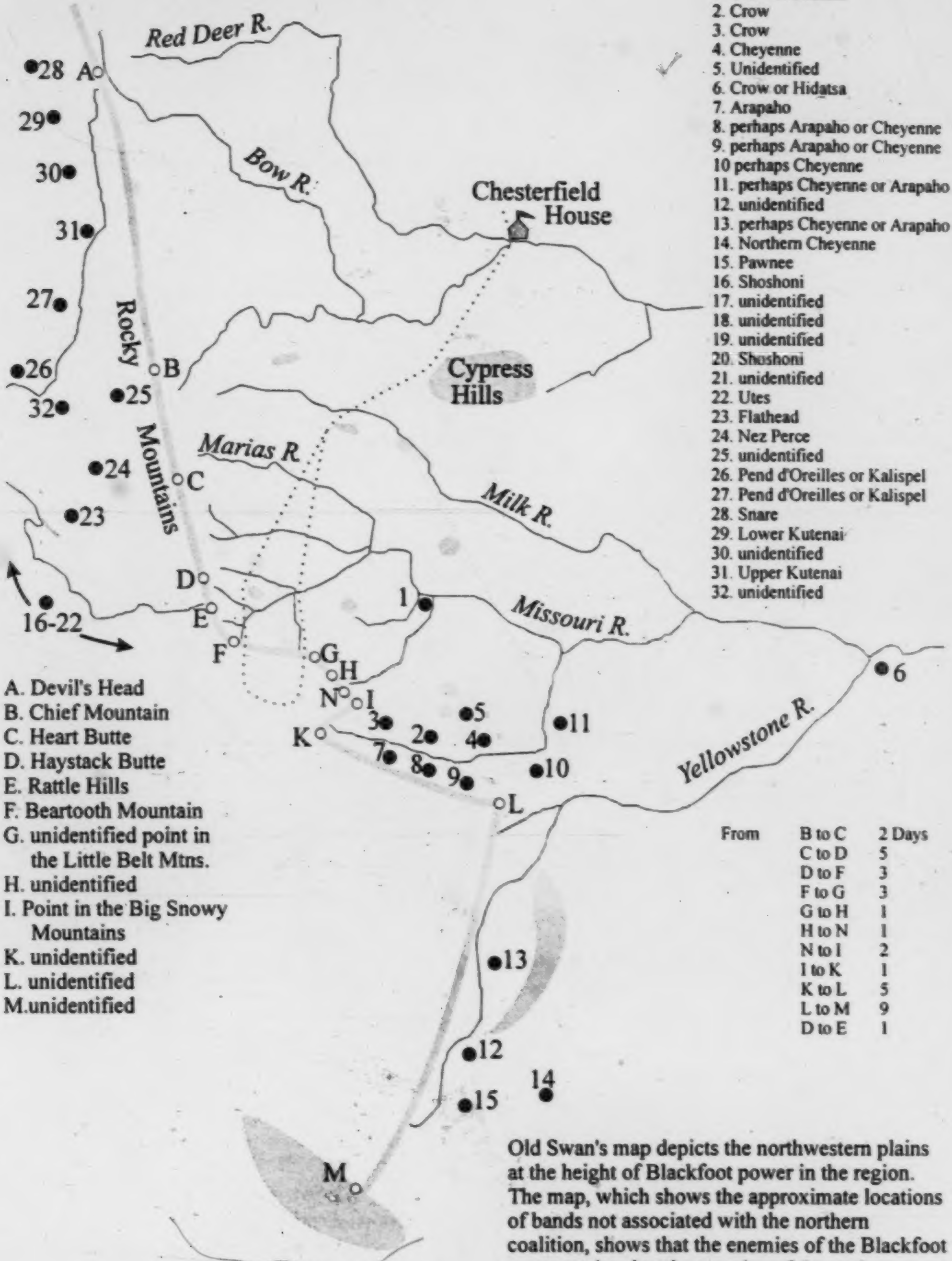
[2] For the Old Swan map see D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307 (4)(1977): 4-15. The Atsina map is discussed in an untitled paper by the late Jim Gibson deposited in the HBCA (PP 1988-14).

Figure A.1
Old Swan's Map of 1801



Source: HBCA E. 3/2 fos. 106d-107 (Retraced by the Author)

Figure A.2
Translation of Old Swan's Map of 1801


Red Deer R.
Bow R.
Chesterfield House
Cypress Hills
Rocky Mountains
Marias R.
Milk R.
Missouri R.
Yellowstone R.
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
N
I
K
L
M
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16-22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32

1. Crow or Hidatsa
2. Crow
3. Crow
4. Cheyenne
5. Unidentified
6. Crow or Hidatsa
7. Arapaho
8. perhaps Arapaho or Cheyenne
9. perhaps Arapaho or Cheyenne
10 perhaps Cheyenne
11. perhaps Cheyenne or Arapaho
12. unidentified
13. perhaps Cheyenne or Arapaho
14. Northern Cheyenne
15. Pawnee
16. Shoshoni
17. unidentified
18. unidentified
19. unidentified
20. Shoshoni
21. unidentified
22. Utes
23. Flathead
24. Nez Perce
25. unidentified
26. Pend d'Oreilles or Kalispel
27. Pend d'Oreilles or Kalispel
28. Snare
29. Lower Kutenai
30. unidentified
31. Upper Kutenai
32. unidentified

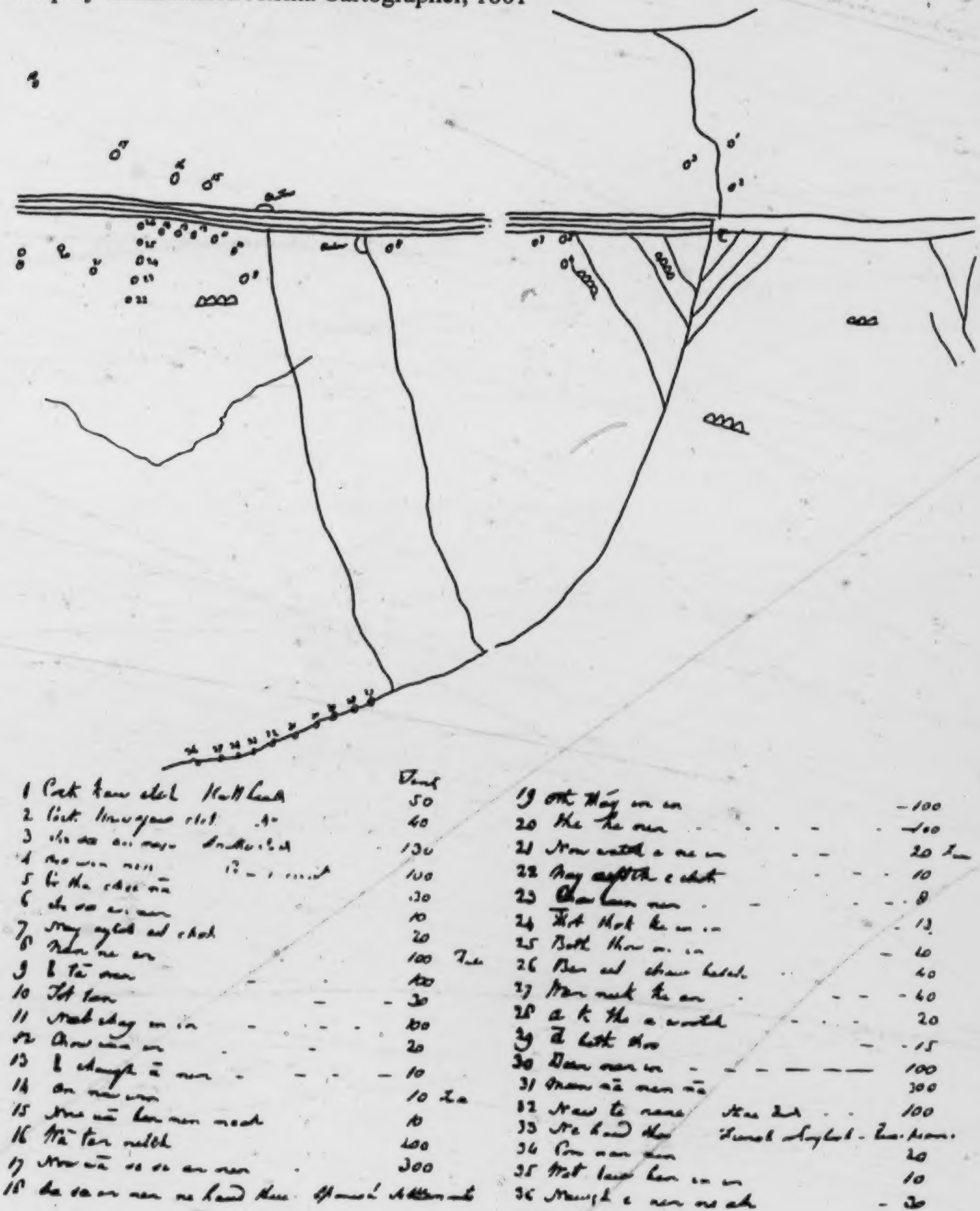
A. Devil's Head
B. Chief Mountain
C. Heart Butte
D. Haystack Butte
E. Rattle Hills
F. Beartooth Mountain
G. unidentified point in the Little Belt Mtns.
H. unidentified
I. Point in the Big Snowy Mountains
K. unidentified
L. unidentified
M.unidentified

From	B to C	2 Days
	C to D	5
	D to F	3
	F to G	3
	G to H	1
	H to N	1
	N to I	2
	I to K	1
	K to L	5
	L to M	9
	D to E	1

Old Swan's map depicts the northwestern plains at the height of Blackfoot power in the region. The map, which shows the approximate locations of bands not associated with the northern coalition, shows that the enemies of the Blackfoot were restricted to the margins of the region.

Adapted from Theodore Binnema, "Indian Maps as Ethnohistorical Sources," and D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307 (4)(1977): 4-15.

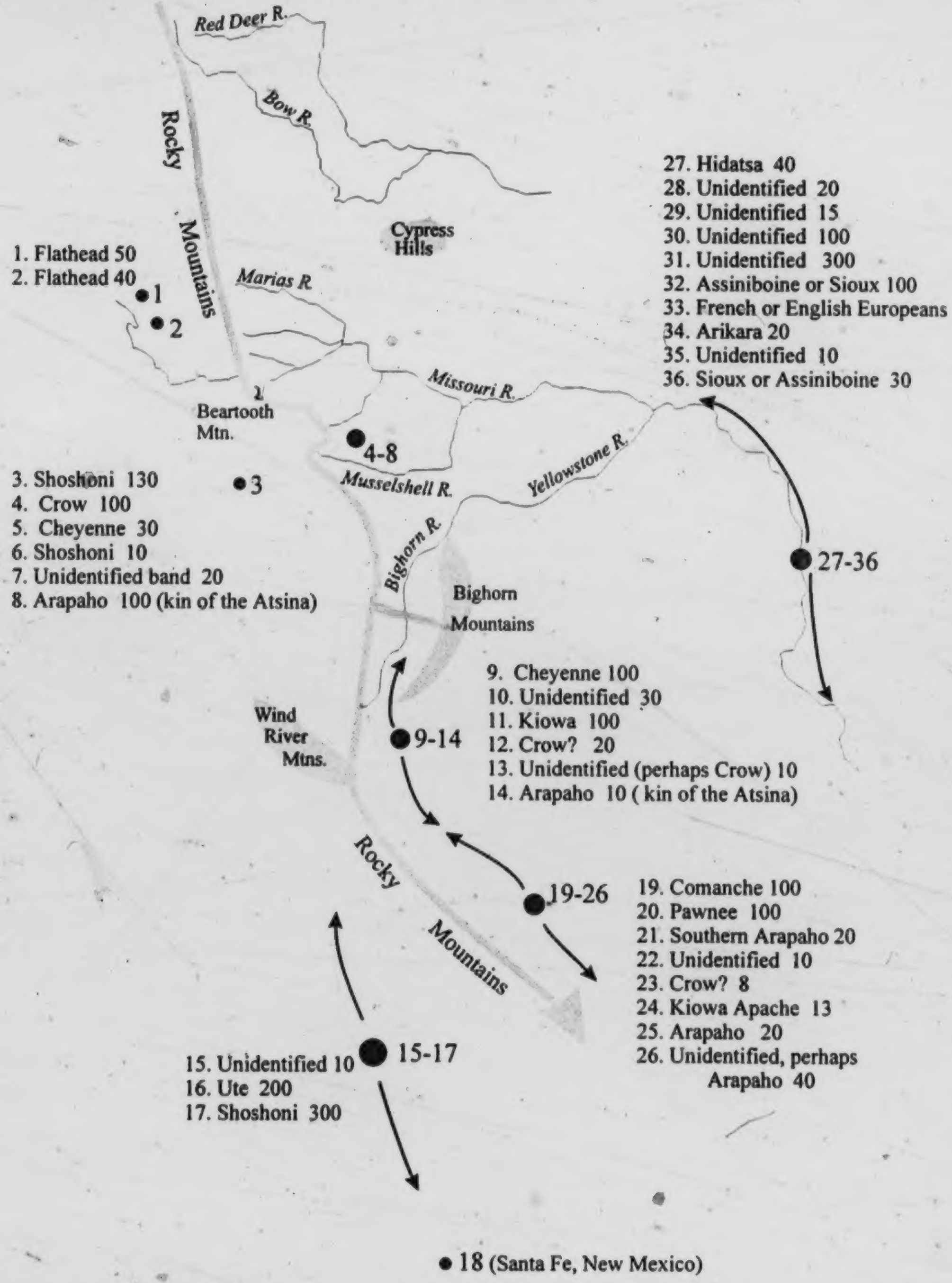
Figure A.3
Map by Unidentified Atsina Cartographer, 1801



1 50
2 40
3 130
4 100
5 30
6 10
7 20
8 100
9 100
10 30
11 100
12 20
13 10
14 10
15 10
16 400
17 300
18
19 100
20 100
21 20
22 10
23 8
24 13
25 60
26 40
27 60
28 20
29 15
30 100
31 300
32 100
33
34 20
35 10
36 30

Source: HBCA E.3/2 fo 105d-106 (Retraced and Modified by the author)

Figure A.4
Translation of Map Drawn by Atsina Cartographer, 1801


Red Deer R.
Bow R.
Rocky Mountains
Cypress Hills
Marias R.
Missouri R.
Beartooth Mtn.
Musselshell R.
Yellowstone R.
Bighorn R.
Bighorn Mountains
Wind River Mtns.
Rocky Mountains
1
2
3
4-8
9-14
15-17
19-26
27-36
1. Flathead 50
2. Flathead 40
3. Shoshoni 130
4. Crow 100
5. Cheyenne 30
6. Shoshoni 10
7. Unidentified band 20
8. Arapaho 100 (kin of the Atsina)
9. Cheyenne 100
10. Unidentified 30
11. Kiowa 100
12. Crow? 20
13. Unidentified (perhaps Crow) 10
14. Arapaho 10 (kin of the Atsina)
15. Unidentified 10
16. Ute 200
17. Shoshoni 300
18 (Santa Fe, New Mexico)
19. Comanche 100
20. Pawnee 100
21. Southern Arapaho 20
22. Unidentified 10
23. Crow? 8
24. Kiowa Apache 13
25. Arapaho 20
26. Unidentified, perhaps Arapaho 40
27. Hidatsa 40
28. Unidentified 20
29. Unidentified 15
30. Unidentified 100
31. Unidentified 300
32. Assiniboine or Sioux 100
33. French or English Europeans
34. Arikara 20
35. Unidentified 10
36. Sioux or Assiniboine 30

Adapted from Theodore Binnema, "Indian Maps as Ethnohistorical Sources," and Jim Gibson, Untitled Manuscript in the HBCA PP 1988-14.